

# Meadowgate School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110949
<b>Local Authority</b>	Cambridgeshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	378201
<b>Inspection dates</b>	20–21 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jeffery Plumb

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
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	120
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sandy Willatt
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jackie McPherson
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 June 2009
<b>School address</b>	Meadowgate Lane Wisbech PE13 2JH
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<b>Age group</b>	3-19
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. They observed nine lessons taught by 10 different teachers. Inspectors held meetings with representatives of the governing body, and with groups of staff and pupils. They analysed a wide range of evidence, including: data on pupils' progress and attainment; attendance data; specialist curriculum programmes; and pupils' work. They also scrutinized samples of statements of special educational needs; individual education plans; care plans; safeguarding policies; minutes of governing body meetings; the school improvement plan; two case studies of pupils in vulnerable circumstances; and 37 questionnaire returns from parents and carers. Feeding programmes were observed as was the arrival of the pupils by bus in the morning.

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

- How successful has the implementation of the recent programme aimed at improving the quality of provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders been in raising their achievement?
- Are all teachers using small-stepped assessments lesson by lesson to set specific learning outcomes for all pupils so as to accelerate their learning?

## Information about the school

Meadowgate School is a complex special needs school, which provides for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. A few pupils have multi-sensory impairment and additional very complex medical needs. Every pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Most pupils are White British and none are from families where English is not the spoken language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. There are significantly more boys than girls on roll. There are many more pupils in the secondary and sixth form departments than in the Early Years Foundation Stage and primary department.

The school has specialist status in physical and sensory learning and as such provides support, particularly in working with pupils on the autistic spectrum disorder, to local schools in the area. Currently a new school is under construction on the existing school site and as a consequence the sixth form are in temporary accommodation, which has an impact on the use of some specialist rooms during the re-build.

**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

Meadowgate School provides an outstanding quality of education and care. Since its last inspection, when it was also judged to be outstanding, it has successfully maintained and built upon its strengths. The headteacher's vision that the needs of every child will be met and that each child will reach her or his full potential is embraced by all staff and translated into classroom practice. Exceptionally effective, joined-up working between education staff and health professionals, innovative and tailored curriculum plans, and the use of modified resources and suitable technology successfully remove obstacles to learning.

Pupils make rapid gains in academic learning and in their personal development. Achievement is outstanding. In 2011, all except for a very few pupils with severe medical conditions met or exceeded their challenging targets in English and mathematics. In recent years, based on national data, all disability sub-groups of pupils have exceeded the expected rate of progress. By the time that Year 11 pupils leave school, they are exceptionally well equipped, within their capability, with the social, job-readiness and college-readiness skills required to be successful in the adult world. The highest achieving pupils with moderate learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders attain good GCSE passes, including in English and mathematics, measured against their starting point on entry to the school. Pupils with the most complex needs usually carry on with their education in the school's sixth form, which successfully equips them with important life skills. Attendance is above average and pupils engage enthusiastically with interesting and relevant activities in lessons. Behaviour is outstanding. Older pupils act as sport leaders and promote a healthy lifestyle amongst younger pupils. They make outstanding gains in how to travel independently and safely. Within their capabilities, their contribution to the community beyond the school's gates is outstanding. They are on a committee linked to the District Council and through this committee they have made a valuable contribution to improving the local park. Pupils' spiritual and cultural diversity awareness seen in the context of their needs is outstanding.

Teaching is outstanding. Assessment of pupils' learning drives lesson planning and very successfully accelerates their progress. However, just occasionally opportunities are missed in making on-the-spot assessments to re-align practice in lessons and move pupils on with new learning immediately. Tasks set in lessons are exceptionally well-matched to what pupils need to learn, and those pupils capable of doing so are able to measure the success of their learning against their individual targets. The innovative and highly relevant curriculum equips pupils with important life skills and

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provides them with a wide range of appropriate accreditation opportunities. Inclusion opportunities for pupils in a number of mainstream schools have brought significant academic and social benefits for them. These opportunities significantly enhance their learning and raise their achievement in physical education and design and technology. The school's outreach work in supporting mainstream teachers to work more effectively with pupils on the autistic spectrum disorder is excellent.

Deeply reflective analysis of every aspect of its performance, careful research and decisive action taken to raise pupils' achievement lie at the core of this very successful school. For example, data analysis in the summer of 2008 showed that a number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties underachieved. Decisive changes since then resulted in pupils with moderate learning difficulties in the year 2010 to 2011 exceeding the rate of progress expected nationally and attaining standards higher than those typical for this sub-group of pupils. Given the impressive success of actions taken to improve the quality of education for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and profound and multiple learning difficulties, the increased accreditation opportunities, and the maintained rates of progress above those expected nationally for all sub-groups of pupils, the school's capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

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

- Improve the quality of teaching and so accelerate pupils' progress further by ensuring consistent use of on-the-spot assessments in all lessons to re-align practice immediately and so move pupils on with new steps of learning.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****1**

All groups of pupils make outstanding progress in learning in lessons. A wide range of suitable teaching methods is used very effectively. Lower functioning pupils with autistic spectrum disorders are enabled to communicate using pictures and, as their frustration dissipates, their behaviour improves significantly. Once ready to learn they make rapid progress. In a total communication environment, pupils with communication difficulties are given challenging options to communicate in the way they feel most comfortable with: some use signs; others pictures; and yet others vocalise. A structured space with a clear schedule exists alongside a sensory area in most classrooms so as to support the different needs within each classroom. This innovative and flexible approach enables all pupils to realise their full academic potential. In Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils are grouped using prior attainment data in order to maximise support. Higher achieving pupils with emotional, moderate and autistic spectrum disorders follow challenging GCSE courses and attain good examination results measured against their capability. All pupils, except for those with the very most complex needs, receive nationally accredited certificates in a range of subjects by the end of Year 11. All pupils, within their capability, acquire important life-skills such as being able to shop using money, read a bus timetable

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and construct a basic household budget.

Pupils have adults in whom they trust and are able to communicate with them in the way in which they feel most comfortable. Pupils are involved in improving their school. For example, through the school council they have had a say in plans for the new school build. With advocacy support they plan and execute a wide range of charity fund raising events. Pupils are keen to take up jobs within the school such as playtime monitors and to be involved in a wide range of community initiatives beyond the school’s gates. Through committee participation in Fenland District Council, they have contributed valuable ideas to improve their local park.

*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>	*
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>	2
<b>The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

Activities in lessons are exceptionally well-matched to pupils’ needs and so very successfully accelerate their learning. Very effective use is made of small-stepped assessments to plan specific learning outcomes for each pupil in every lesson. Consequently, each pupil makes outstanding progress. In an English lesson, careful positioning and intensive interactive one-to-one support enabled pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties to lift their heads and use switches to communicate, while pointing with their eyes at the teaching assistant working with them. Higher functioning pupils with autistic spectrum disorders made rapid progress in a

<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 the expectations for the pupils’ age

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mathematics lesson and reached standards close to age expectation because the activities set for them were challenging and fit for purpose. High expectations, excellent subject knowledge and demanding pace enable pupils with moderate learning difficulties to make rapid progress in lessons and reach high standards in reading, writing and mathematics measured against their capability.

Highly personalised and flexibly planned, the curriculum meets pupils’ academic and personal needs exceptionally well. Tailored move programmes are very successfully implemented, increasing pupils’ independent mobility skills. An extensive range of switches and electronic communication aids support pupils in communicating choices with confidence. Within their capability, pupils with the most complex communication needs have excellent communication passports, which support them when they go shopping or into a cafe to purchase a drink. Specific disability and subject expertise enables the school to provide an exceptionally relevant and broad curriculum. This equips pupils with the life skills required to cope, within their capability, as secure young adults in the world. There is a wide range of very appropriate accreditation opportunities and the curriculum is significantly enriched through extra-curricular sporting, art and music activities. These activities enrich pupils’ learning and develop their creative and physical skills exceptionally well.

Excellent on-site medical provision reduces the amount of pupil absenteeism significantly because very few pupils need to be away from school to attend hospital clinics. Outstanding planning by health professionals ensures that pupils’ care needs are exceptionally well met. For example, therapists work very effectively to promote, as far as possible, pupils’ independence in eating. Modifications to utensils and advice given to teaching assistants on how to position pupils comfortably and introduce new foods gradually enable a few pupils to progress from being tube-fed, to taking pureed food, to managing soft-chopped food. Detailed care plans, implemented diligently, ensure that pupils’ toileting and medical needs are met with dignity. Teachers and teaching assistants are highly skilled in using slings and hoists to lift pupils into comfortable positions so that they are ready to learn. Parents and carers are exceptionally well-supported to help them manage their children’s complex behavioural, communication and medical needs. Pupils’ induction into the school is excellent as are the arrangements to support Year 11 pupils and sixth form students when they leave school.

*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?**

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The senior leadership team, led by the headteacher, promotes ambition and drive exceptionally well which very successfully raises pupils’ achievement. Challenging targets are set for each pupil and they are almost always met. Leadership responsibilities are shared. Subject and specialist leaders make a very valuable contribution in implementing very specific programmes, which support pupils. For example, a recently introduced strategy to support pupils with profound and multiple difficulties has improved their responsiveness in terms of anticipation and communicating choices. Monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous and feedback to teachers successfully enables them to improve their teaching.

Through an extensive range of partnerships, the school successfully enriches pupils’ learning. Parents and carers are exceptionally well-supported in helping their children to learn. Equality of opportunity lies at the heart of this school and inclusion opportunities with mainstream schools accelerate pupils’ learning. These programmed inclusion experiences also change the attitude of mainstream pupils towards disability; they develop a very positive approach to disability. The school is a centre of excellence for the skills it has in handling pupils with physical disabilities. Pupils’ understanding and involvement in their local, national and international communities, particularly in respect of disability issues, is outstanding. There are very strong national and international links with schools which support pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Members of the governing body ask the headteacher challenging and penetrating questions about pupils’ achievements and they are exceptionally supportive of the school’s work. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. Child protection procedures fully meet requirements and risk assessments, including of pupils’ medical needs, are exceptionally thorough and detailed. The governing body diligently ensures that there is robust monitoring of all equipment used to move pupils so as to ensure that it is safe. They ensure very effective systems are in place to rigorously monitor the implementation of pupils’ care plans so that their medical needs are met.

*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>1</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>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>1</b>



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**The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money**

**1**

### **Early Years Foundation Stage**

There are few children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Each has exceptionally complex needs. The children start out not able to engage with activities and with no sounds. They make outstanding progress. Their communication and independent mobility improves significantly as they begin to recognize cues for what is going to happen next. For example, during regular routines they reach out with their hands and sign that they want to experience more. Children interact well with stimulating objects, banging, shaking and scraping the instruments on the hello hoop at the start of each day. Others learn to relax and lie calmly in a still position. Anticipation, interaction with objects and communication skills measured in the context of children’s capabilities are outstanding. Children’s eyes point meaningfully and their faces light up with smiles, which are responses indicating engagement with what is going on around them and enjoyment of their experiences.

The modified curriculum is outstanding as is the quality of teaching and care the children receive. Each morning, following focused physiotherapy work and meeting toilet needs, each child is carefully and comfortably positioned so that they can access resources and respond to their teaching as independently as possible. The staff team assess children’s development through each session and use assessments immediately to set the children new targets and so accelerate their learning and development. For example, observing that a child responded to a vibrating car and calmed, this has been built into his personalised plan to engage his interest and develop his response skills. Challenge is built in as the car is moved just beyond his reach to encourage reaching out and exploring with his hands. Deeply reflective, the Early Years Foundation Stage staff team meet daily and discuss each child’s progress during that day. They then re-align their planning for the next day to challenge each child to realise his or her full potential. There is a clear improvement plan based on evaluation of current practice. Partnership with parents and carers is excellent. They are given valuable support in helping their children to communicate, to eat and drink with increased independence at home, and in how to maximize opportunities for their children to move as freely as possible.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

### **Sixth form**

**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

Students entering the sixth form have very complex needs. They make outstanding progress because they have individually tailored programmes, matched to their specific needs. Teaching is fit for purpose and, within their capability; sixth form students leave school and enter college with a wide range of nationally recognized qualifications. Their life skills development is a very strong feature. Through an enterprise project, they learn important business skills at a level appropriate. Almost all gain confidence through meaningful work placements within the community. By the time the vast majority of sixth form students leave school, within their capability they have an understanding of how to travel independently; know how to shop for food to make a healthy meal; and how to wash and iron their clothes.

Assessment is used very effectively to plan targets for each student based on their academic and personal needs. There is a sharp focus on developing students’ communication, mathematical and personal development skills. By the time they leave school the vast majority of students have the confidence to cope as independent young adults in the world. Care, guidance and support are excellent and every student is found an appropriate placement at college. The students’ families are exceptionally well-supported when students’ move from school to college. Their learning is very significantly enriched through visits and residential experiences.

The staff team reflect deeply on the provision and plan for improvement. The provision is rigorously monitored and based on evidence gathered effective change is implemented to improve the provision. Currently changes are being made to improve the accreditation opportunities for the life-skills programme, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this development. There is a ‘buzz’ of excitement about the planned new accommodation for the sixth form and students have had a say in the planning of the new flat, where their independent living skills can be developed further.

*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**

Returns from questionnaires show that almost all parents and carers are delighted with what the school achieves for their children. They wrote that: ‘The difference that this school has made to all of our lives is phenomenal. My son always asks every night, ‘School tomorrow Mum?’ even at weekends. Say no more, I think it speaks for itself’. Another wrote: ‘I have great respect for the imaginative and high standard of teaching’. Inspection evidence reflects the positive comments made by parents and carers about the school.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Meadowgate 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 37 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	86	5	12	1	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	86	6	14	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	34	81	6	14	2	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	74	9	21	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	31	74	10	24	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	30	71	9	21	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	71	10	24	2	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)	29	69	8	19	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	32	76	7	17	2	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	67	10	24	1	2	2	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	71	8	19	3	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	33	79	6	14	1	2	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	34	81	6	14	1	2	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	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](http://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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



24 October 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Meadowgate School, Wisbech, PE13 2JH**

We enjoyed our recent visit to your outstanding school. Thank you for talking with us about your work. Your school is exceptionally caring and meets your needs outstandingly well. The enterprise projects develop your work-related and problem-solving skills very well. You make rapid progress in English and mathematics. Here are the main things we found.

- Your lessons are challenging, interesting and fun for you and help you gain independence and improve your communication skills.
- Your curriculum helps you develop important life skills and to gain very good qualifications.
- Special furniture, computers with switches and outstanding teaching take away barriers to learning for you.
- You understand the importance of keeping yourselves healthy and safe and care for each other.
- Your behaviour is excellent.
- Your headteacher and staff ensure that you get the very best possible education and care.

We have asked your headteacher to make sure that your teachers always use observations of what you do well and struggle with in lessons to move you forward with your learning immediately.

Yours sincerely

Jeffery Plumb  
Lead Inspector

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