

Meadows School

London Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN4 0RN

Inspection dates 9–10 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Changes to the leadership team since the previous inspection have sharpened the school's focus on students' learning and progress. Students now achieve better results in a broader range of subjects than before.
- Students make particularly rapid progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and science. They make good progress in mathematics.
- A recent move to encourage students to read more regularly and widely is effective. Staff make their expectations clear and students make good progress, often from low starting points.
- The quality of teaching has improved. Planning successfully takes into account students' needs and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given appropriate importance.
- The school has a positive atmosphere; students often show their enthusiasm for learning and are keen to achieve more.
- The school successfully helps students to improve their behaviour and to re-engage with education having had poor experiences elsewhere.
- The sixth form is good. Students enjoy learning and build their basic skills well, helping to prepare them effectively for their future lives.
- Leaders have improved the way they collect and use data to track students' progress. Increasingly ambitious targets are set for students so that teachers can help them to make rapid progress.
- The governing body plays an effective part in supporting the school's development. Governors make regular visits to the school and have a secure understanding of its work.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' overall progress in English is less strong than in other subjects because the school does not have a consistent enough approach to tackle the difficulties that students experience in writing.
- Teachers and learning support assistants do not adopt consistent ways of teaching students to use the sounds that letters make to help them read and spell.
- Learning support assistants' work is not always effectively planned by teachers to ensure that they provide appropriate support for improving students' writing and reading skills.
- The quality of learning off site is not monitored in sufficient depth.
- Leaders and managers at all levels are sometimes not rigorous enough in checking the quality of learning in lessons.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector, together with the principal and the vice principal, observed teaching and learning in 12 lessons, taught by 12 teachers and other appropriately qualified staff.
- Students, teachers and school leaders met with the inspector to discuss the school's work.
- The inspector held telephone discussions with representatives of the governing body and Barnardo's senior management team.
- The inspector looked carefully at a range of documents including the school improvement plan.
- The inspector considered the views of 10 parents and carers provided through the Parent View website.

Inspection team

Jon Carter, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Meadows is a school run by the social care charity Barnardo's.
- A new vice principal (Head of Education) was appointed in September 2011.
- Students often join the school at times other than the beginning of the school year.
- All students have experienced a disrupted education due to exclusion from other schools.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is slightly higher than average because the school has a higher proportion of looked-after children than seen nationally. There are more boys than girls on the school roll.
- Students attend lessons at a range of alternative providers off site as part of their normal curriculum. These include K College, Horizons, White Rocks, Hadlow College, Mascalls School and Woodside Farm.
- The school has residential provision in three on-site houses which was not included in this inspection. Around one third of students are boarders.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that students make more rapid progress in writing, reading and spelling, by:
 - establishing school-wide policies and consistent practices to support students' learning through a better understanding of how to use the sounds letters make to write words they can say and read words they do not recognise
 - ensuring the work of learning support assistants is clearly planned in all lessons and is particularly focused on improving students' writing and reading skills.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the lesson observation skills of leaders and managers at all levels so that they are highly focused on learning when monitoring the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that teaching of and planning and support for writing are rigorously monitored to ensure they have a positive and measureable impact on students' writing skills
 - ensuring that the quality of learning at off-site alternative provision is rigorously monitored.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students come to the school with levels of attainment that are usually well below that expected for their age. They often have particular difficulties with reading and writing, which they can sometimes find embarrassing. This compounds the social and emotional difficulties that they experience and affects their readiness to learn.
- From these starting points, students make good progress overall. While the gaps in their learning close increasingly quickly, their attainment by the time they leave school is still below average compared to all students nationally.
- Nevertheless, the range of qualifications that students achieve before leaving school is increasing and the grades they are achieving are improving well. For example, an increasing and sizeable proportion of students are now leaving with GCSE qualifications in mathematics and English. The achievements of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, including looked after children, are comparable to the other students at the school and illustrate how the school works actively to ensure equal opportunities for all students.
- The sharper focus on learning has helped students to value their achievements more. Students in Year 8, for example, showed great enthusiasm at the prospect of continuing to work for their Entry Level 2 certificate in design and technology.
- Students' learning is particularly strong in practical subjects such as science and ICT; most make rapid progress in these areas. A large majority of students make good progress in mathematics.
- Progress in English is weaker than in other subjects. Students' reading skills are progressing more rapidly as a result of the school's daily focus on reading. This is modelled effectively, for example, by the principal, who reads in a central location within the school during this session. Consequently, students are reading more regularly and are accessing a wider range of books.
- However, students with reading skills that are well below what would be expected for their age do not always make rapid progress. This is because staff do not use a common approach to help them work out words for themselves by identifying the sounds each letter makes.
- Students make slower progress in writing because they are unfamiliar with the correspondence between sounds and letters. Those who experience most difficulty with writing do not always get sufficient opportunity to practise their skills because staff scribe for students too frequently rather than providing planned support that helps them to develop better writing skills.
- Students who attend the school's 16-plus provision make good progress in their numeracy and literacy skills. They successfully complete courses and gain qualifications, for example in construction and first aid, which help to ensure that they are well prepared for living and working independently.

The quality of teaching is good

- Lesson planning makes good use of teachers' assessments of students' prior achievements. Learning is often tailored well to students' individual needs so that expectations of each student's progress are clear within the broader aims of the lesson as a whole.
- Learning objectives are usually clearly displayed and explained to students so that they have a good idea of what is expected of them. In most lessons, teachers revisit the objectives regularly to check that students are making appropriate progress and are learning successfully.
- In a few outstanding lessons, opportunities for students to collaborate and take responsibility are planned and developed very well. For example, in a food technology lesson for Year 10, a student who had progressed well had been 'promoted' to be the teacher's 'sous chef'. He confidently took on the responsibility of coaching other students and was clearly proud of the

skills he had learned.

- Many lessons identify well how particular aspects of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development will be incorporated into the learning experience. Often these are linked to students' behavioural needs or development of their interpersonal skills.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to engage students well. Students often ask considered questions because the lesson material has stimulated their interest; teachers' responses extend students' learning effectively.
- Students regularly make use of the resources vibrantly displayed in most classes to remind them about what they have been learning. This helps to extend their vocabulary and encourages them to participate. For example, in a history lesson for Year 11, students learning about ancient Greek and Roman medicine recalled words such as 'asclepion' and 'humours' together with their meanings and linked these to the material they had recently learned.
- Teachers use questioning skilfully to guide and check students' learning and progress. Students' work is marked regularly and teachers consistently provide positive feedback with targets and next steps to help them improve.
- Teachers plan for regular opportunities for writing as part of learning in lessons across the curriculum. However, staff take over too readily where students have particular difficulties in writing and do too much of this part of their work for them.
- The school's special educational needs coordinator provides training for staff and supports individual students with literacy difficulties. However, this is focused on individual needs and is not driven by a systematic and consistent whole-school approach to teaching reading and writing.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour in the classroom and around school is typically good. In part this is due to the staff's skilful management of learning and high expectations. Importantly, students who are well established at the school set a positive example to others who may still be experiencing difficulties with their behaviour. They do this by having good attitudes to learning and participating well in lessons. This ensures that the school is usually a calm and welcoming learning environment.
- When students who are new to the school display poor behaviour that reflects their social, emotional and educational needs, staff respond positively and consistently. Exclusion is used judiciously and proportionately in order to maintain a safe school environment while ensuring students miss the least amount of education possible. Alternative sanctions are always sought and used where appropriate, taking into account the reason why the exclusion is necessary.
- Students often have mature attitudes towards difference and recognise that prejudice is unacceptable. Where bullying or other relationship issues occur, staff are quick to respond and support students well to resolve problems amicably. This ensures students feel safe at school.
- The school has strong links with a school in Kenya which helps students to develop positive attitudes to people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. During the inspection, four students from the partner school participated in lessons and were treated respectfully by Meadows students.
- Students often have a history of very poor attendance when they start at the school. Most students are punctual and make good improvements in how regularly they come to school. This is because the school provides students with choices in their curriculum to engage them well.

The leadership and management are good

- The recent appointment of a new vice principal has reinvigorated teaching. His leadership over the past 12 months has helped staff at all levels to focus more on the quality of learning in lessons. There is a shared vision among staff that students can and should be expected to achieve well.
 - The leadership team know that accelerating learning for students who have missed large amounts of their education is the key to ensuring that students leave school well qualified. They have, therefore, set ambitious targets for students' progress and communicated this effectively to staff, securing their commitment to ongoing school development and improved achievement for students.
 - Systems for monitoring the quality of teaching have developed well. Observations of learning in lessons have contributed to whole-school development planning. Training programmes are appropriately focused on school priorities and help staff to make their practice more effective.
 - Senior leaders generally evaluate the quality of teaching and learning accurately although occasionally they are not sufficiently rigorous. They can be a little generous in their judgements because they are not always highly focused on the learning that has taken place. The quality of the teaching of writing skills and its impact on students' learning has not been a specific focus of lesson observations.
 - The proprietor gives the school and its leaders good support through the provision of a School Improvement Partner who visits the school regularly.
 - Improvements to the curriculum have increased students' attitudes to learning because older students now have a choice of subjects they can study. This has improved achievement because students try harder in subjects that interest them and, therefore, make better progress.
 - The range of courses taught at off-site locations by alternative providers has increased to supplement the curriculum well. However, monitoring arrangements to ensure that leaders have an accurate view of the quality of learning on these courses are at an early stage of development and are currently not sufficiently rigorous and leaders do not know enough about the impact of provision at those other sites.
 - The school has an extensive range of effective partnerships that help to support students' learning and development. Students in the school's post-16 provision, for example, have received mentoring from senior managers from the Post Office to help them when applying for jobs.
 - Effective systems are in place to ensure that students' welfare is actively promoted. Arrangements for safeguarding students meet the government's current requirements.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - is effective because members of the governing body visit the school regularly to gain a good understanding of its day-to-day work
 - ensures that financial resources are well used, although the school experiences difficulties in securing the pupil premium funding for looked after children from some of the local authorities that place students at the school, which affects its ability to provide support for their particular needs
 - provides a helpful source of challenge and support through its members' experience and expertise in care and leadership.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119029
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	405827

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	49
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Newmark
Principal	Mike Price
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 November 2010
Telephone number	01892 529144
Fax number	01892 527787
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