

Meadowcroft School

24 Bar Lane, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 4AD

Inspection dates

4–6 February 2014

Overall effectiveness

Adequate 3

Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Adequate	3
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate because

- Not enough students make good progress in English and mathematics from their different starting points, particularly those in the sixth form.
- The quality of teaching and learning is not consistently good and work does not always interest and challenge students to achieve their best.
- Teachers do not always manage students' behaviour firmly enough. Revised systems for securing students' good behaviour are not yet fully established. A small minority of students lack motivation; as a result they make too little progress.
- The subjects and courses offered do not fully interest and engage all students in learning, especially students in the sixth form. Provision to ensure students adopt healthy lifestyles is not always effective enough.
- Policy documents related to students' welfare, health and safety are not reviewed and updated frequently enough.
- The system for leaders and managers to effectively check and improve the quality of teaching is not firmly established. New systems to track students' achievement and progress are not yet fully embedded.

The school has the following strengths

- New leaders and managers are clear about what needs to be done to improve the school. They have gained the confidence of staff and the proprietor. Clear systems to check and monitor students' progress and improve behaviour have been put in place.
- Teaching is getting better and more students are making quicker progress than in the past.
- The curriculum is enriched with activities and trips that meet the interests and needs of students well.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with a full day's notice.
- The inspector observed eight lessons taught by seven different teachers. The inspector looked at students' work in their books and held meetings with the proprietor, senior managers, teachers and students.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' progress, assessment records and records pertaining to the professional development of staff. He checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector took account of the views expressed in 11 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Chanan Tomlin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Meadowcroft School opened in April 2007 as a non-profit day school for boys and girls with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school, which was previously located in Bradford, moved to new premises on the outskirts of Wakefield in September 2011.
- The school was owned and run by Meadowcroft Care and Education Ltd. It changed ownership in November 2013 and is now owned by Acorn Care and Education Ltd. A new headteacher was appointed in January 2014. A new senior management team has recently been formed and most teachers are new to the school.
- The school is registered for students aged five to 19 years. There are currently 34 students on roll aged 12 to 19 years, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs. The students come from four local authorities within the Yorkshire region.
- All of the students have been placed at the school because of the extreme personal difficulties they have experienced in their previous schools, which resulted in serious disruption to their education because of low attendance and challenging behaviour.
- The school aims 'to encourage each and every student in all aspects of learning' by targeting the development of the curriculum, meeting their individual needs, rewarding achievement and helping them to improve their behaviour.
- The school was last inspected in November 2010.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching to raise students' progress and attainment, including those in the sixth form, by:
 - embedding the new system to track and check students' progress so that teachers can use this information to ensure that students are always set work that challenges them to achieve their best
 - identifying ways of getting all students, including those in the sixth form, interested and engaged in learning in all lessons.
- Improve the curriculum by:
 - seeking ways to offer subjects and courses that motivate and fully interest all students, especially those in the sixth form
 - providing more effective provision for personal, social and health education.
- Improve students behaviour by firmly implementing revised systems to manage students' behaviour, especially when it is most challenging.
- Improve welfare, health and safety through:
 - reviewing policy documents related to welfare, health and safety more frequently to ensure that they are always up-to-date with legislation and guidance
 - ensuring that the behaviour policy is always implemented effectively.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - establishing a rigorous system to check the quality of teaching and learning to identify where teachers' skills need to be improved, in order to help raise students' achievement
 - providing more opportunities for teachers to increase their skills and to share good practice.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Achievement is adequate because not enough students make good progress in English and mathematics from their different starting points, particularly those in the sixth form. In recent times there has not been enough good quality teaching to secure students' better achievement. Many students join the school having not attended school for long periods of time and having not succeeded in their previous placements; most have very low levels of attainment. A small minority do not appreciate the importance of education and distrust educational establishments.

Teaching is getting better and staff work hard to encourage students to apply themselves to their work and engage in learning better. Evidence from lesson observations and the school's records show that as a result of stronger teaching, more students are now making or exceeding expected progress in English and mathematics, however, taking account of their varying starting points, the majority of these students have made adequate progress over time.

Where students are motivated and interested in their lessons they generally now achieve well. However, despite encouragement from staff, a small minority of students are difficult to motivate and sometimes find it hard to participate in learning. As a result, they do not make enough progress and achieve as much as they should. This is particularly so of students in the sixth form who do not take full advantage of many of the courses offered and choose not to attend vocational and college courses away from the school site.

Students have achieved external accreditations including entry level qualifications in a good range of subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT) and religious studies (RE), in addition to the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. A few students have taken GCSE courses in English and mathematics and have achieved a pass grade. In lessons, students that engage fully in learning acquire knowledge quickly and a secure understanding of the subjects that they are taught. They develop and apply a range of skills including those for reading, writing, communication and mathematics. The school aims to 'encourage each and every student in all aspects of learning'. It meets these aims for some students, but not all students are prepared well enough for the next stages in their lives.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Behaviour and personal development are adequate. During some lessons, especially the more interactive ones, most students behave well and are interested in what is being taught and participate and apply themselves to their work. For example, during a physical education (PE) martial arts lesson, students practised kicks and manoeuvres while the teacher worked individually with one student. These students displayed good behaviour and positive attitudes towards learning and made good progress throughout the lesson. However, over time, students' behaviour in lessons and around the school and their attitudes to work are adequate. Students occasionally present extremely challenging behaviour. This is usually managed successfully by staff. However, students' behaviour is not yet good because revised systems to promote good behaviour are not implemented firmly enough by all staff. Despite the efforts of staff to encourage participation, a small minority of students have poor attitudes towards learning. These students are complacent and unenthused and end up wasting time during the lesson. Attendance is adequate and has been steadily improving over the past three years. Lessons start punctually.

Students learn about the different forms of bullying and the harm that bullying causes. Younger students say that bullying is rare but older ones say that it occurs more often. However, all students have confidence in the school's procedures to deter bullying and agree that incidents are dealt with appropriately by staff. Students learn about moral issues and behaviour that is socially

acceptable through, for example, personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. Students are encouraged to socialise during break times and afternoon activities that take place off-site. Supervision and levels of care are appropriate and students say that they feel safe at school. Students mostly get along well with teachers and are friendly and welcoming when visitors come to the school. However, they are finding it difficult to adjust to the newly appointed senior management team and the changes recently introduced by them; this has caused a little resentment and resistance to authority.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is adequate. Students learn about aspects of spirituality through art, music and nature pursuits. Some students gain insights into spirituality through RE. However, this is not fully reinforced through a broad range of visits to places of worship other than Wakefield Cathedral. Students learn about other cultures, racism and discrimination through RE, history and geography. As a result, they develop tolerance and respect for people with different cultural traditions. Students help in the community by clearing pavements to make them safe for pedestrians and by helping organise a 'Coffee Morning' for a national charity. They improve in self-confidence and self-esteem when they succeed in their learning and are rewarded points for achievement. Students elect a 'School Council' that is actively involved in the running of the school; this helps them understand the democratic process and helps create a sense of community in the school. Students are encouraged to develop attitudes that will enable them to make a positive contribution to society. During citizenship lessons, they are offered balanced presentations of opposing political views.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

Teaching is adequate. The quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school and, over time, has not been good enough to enable students to make consistently good or better progress. During the inspection, some good and outstanding teaching was observed. Teachers are keen for students to achieve well and make good progress. They generally use imaginative teaching strategies. Most lessons are well-paced and supported with a good range of resources and activities. For example, during a Key Stage 3 French lesson, students used new phrases that they learned while they served each other croissants and other foods in a French 'restaurant'. Students enjoyed learning and made at least good progress.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and are generally skilled at reshaping tasks and explanations according to students' responses during lessons. Teachers place an appropriate focus on developing students' reading, writing, mathematics and communication skills. Most students respond effectively, engage in learning and now make faster progress in these areas. However, some teaching fails to capture students' interest. As a result, a small minority of students do not respond well enough to their teachers. They show little interest in their work, occasionally disrupt lessons and disturb their peers and so learning and progress in lessons is limited.

Staff mostly have good relationships with students; they are good role models. Teachers are very patient and usually manage rare occasions of students' very challenging behaviour well. Leaders have introduced a point system to encourage students to behave and participate in learning. This system is not yet fully embedded and is meeting some resistance by students. Not all teachers implement these new strategies firmly enough, as a result, a small minority of students fail to respond to the efforts of their teachers and their progress slows.

Teachers assess learning and progress regularly. The school has recently introduced a system to track and check students' achievement and progress. This system is not yet fully embedded and so teachers do not have all of the information they need to ensure that work set is challenging enough so students achieve their best.

Quality of curriculum**Adequate**

The curriculum is adequate. It is well organised and supported with detailed schemes of work and with planning for a progression in learning. The curriculum provides a suitable range of opportunities for students to develop skills and make progress in reading, writing, mathematics and communication. However, the subjects and courses on offer do not always fully motivate and engage students so that they achieve their best. For example, a small minority of students are disinterested and do not take full advantage of what is provided for them; these students do not make enough progress. Furthermore, students in the Sixth Form do not attend any of the vocational or college courses offered, and prefer to study functional skills courses on the school site instead, such as in ICT, English and mathematics. Where students of varying aptitudes and abilities have positive attitudes to their work they have plenty of opportunities to make good progress and to gain qualifications that will help them in their future lives.

The curriculum is enriched with a good variety of activities and trips that take place every afternoon; these are designed to stimulate students' interest and to provide them with experiences that they can apply to different aspects of their education. These include work in a music studio, sporting activities and visits to museums and exhibitions. All students join a yearly residential trip in the countryside. Students are adequately prepared for their future economic well-being through a focus on English, mathematics and citizenship. An experienced teacher delivers careers advice. The provision made for PSHE reflects the school's aims and ethos. However, it is not fully effective in promoting healthy lifestyles.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety**Adequate**

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is adequate and all of the independent school standards are met. Leaders and staff are very committed to students' best interests. The school has established policies and procedures related to health and safety that are in almost all respects in keeping with current legislation and guidance and are implemented effectively; these include policies for first-aid and anti-bullying. During the inspection, a small number of minor omissions in some policies were found; these were brought to the attention of school leaders and were rectified immediately. Although policy documents are reviewed regularly they are not reviewed sufficiently frequently to ensure that they are always fully up-to-date and concise. This does not compromise any of the regulations. The school works with parents, carers and other agencies well to secure a safe environment for students.

Arrangements for safeguarding are adequate; a policy is in place that is regularly reviewed and the designated person for safeguarding, and all staff, have attended appropriate training at the required levels and intervals. The school has a policy for the safe recruitment of staff that is implemented effectively; required checks are conducted for new staff and are recorded in a single central register. The school prepares detailed risk assessments for school trips and conducts regular checks on the premises and accommodation. There is a satisfactory level of fire safety; a fire risk assessment has been completed, equipment is checked regularly and fire drills are regular events that are duly recorded.

Arrangements for the supervision of students are suitable and students say that they feel safe in school. Staff take incidents of bullying very seriously and take measures to deal with these effectively. Students learn about nutrition and health through PSHE and science. However, lessons do not always convince students to achieve healthy lifestyles. A number of the students smoke and eat unhealthy foods; few are keen to pursue healthier lifestyles.

Leadership and management**Adequate**

Leadership and management is adequate. Despite being very new to the school, the headteacher has quickly gained the confidence of the proprietors and respect of her staff, many of who are also

new to the school. The school's leadership is clear about what needs to be done to secure improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in order to secure better achievement. Senior leaders and managers have a clear view how good the school can be; they expect the best from both students and staff. However, leadership and management require improvement because teaching is not yet consistently good. As a result, although most students make steady progress over time, too few do better than this.

A rigorous system to check the quality of teaching and identify how teachers can improve their skills to secure students better learning and faster progress is not fully established. Opportunities for teachers to share good practice are not yet fully in place. As a result, teaching and learning over time are adequate. Leaders have introduced new systems to check how well each student is doing. These arrangements are still to be fully embedded and so provide teachers with the information they need about the progress students make.

Leaders and managers appreciate the importance of self-evaluation as a vehicle to identify how well the school is doing and where they need to secure improvements. They have started a clear and useful self-evaluation process in the short time since joining the school. Development plans are well-focused and well-considered. Senior leaders work well with parents, carers and external agencies to secure benefits for students. They have developed suitable policies that promote progress in all subjects, and skill areas such as literacy. The curriculum and the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students are appropriate. Senior leaders recognise that the provision to enhance students' personal development needs to be improved and that more needs to be done to ensure that the curriculum interests and motivates all students, especially those in the sixth form.

Staff and resources are deployed well for the benefit of all students. The premises and accommodation are large and well-suited and equipped to support the curriculum. All areas of the school are adequately maintained and decorated to a satisfactory standard. Some areas of the school need to be modernised and school leaders have clear plans and resources to facilitate this. The school meets all of the requirements related to the provision of information to parents and carers, and the complaints procedure meets the requirements. The proprietors and senior managers have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135216
Inspection number	422786
DfE registration number	380/6348

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Day special school for students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	34
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
Chair	Mr Graham McEwan
Headteacher	Ms Lynette Edwards
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,416
Telephone number	01274 634666
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	info@meadowcroftschoo.com

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