

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



18 November 2015

Mrs Jackie McPherson
Headteacher
Meadowgate School
Meadowgate Lane
Wisbech
Cambridgeshire
PE13 2JH

Dear Mrs McPherson

Short inspection of Meadowgate School

Following my visit to the school with Her Majesty's Inspector Prue Rayner on 3 November 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in November 2011.

This school continues to be outstanding.

You have made significant improvements to the already outstanding quality of education provided in the school since the last inspection. This is because you are determined that each pupil shall achieve the greatest possible academic and personal success, and benefit from the highest standard of care and support. This commitment is shared by other leaders, including governors, and all staff. You and many of your colleagues have completed high-level research into techniques that best enable pupils to learn and make rapid progress. Teachers and teaching assistants have worked together well to use and refine the most effective teaching methods. The impact on the progress of, for example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and those who have profound and multiple learning difficulties has been significant.

Teachers and others make very effective use of equipment, including information communications technology (ICT), to help pupils with limited speech or mobility to communicate. This enables them to engage with their environment, their peers and their teachers in ways that ensure that they make rapid progress from their starting points. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the difference the school makes; during the inspection, one parent commented that 'being at this school has transformed my daughter's life as well as her learning.'

Since the previous inspection, pupils have benefited from considerable investment in new school buildings and facilities. This has enabled members of the sixth form to study vocational courses such as motor vehicle mechanics and catering, and complete work-related learning, in purpose-built facilities. The design of these new facilities and courses is a further expression of the school's ethos that the curriculum and wider provision made to support pupils should meet the needs, abilities and aspirations of each individual pupil. Pupils' success in a range of subjects has led to a number going on to take high-level courses at college, gain recognised qualifications and enter employment. Given these pupils' starting points, these are outstanding outcomes.

Pupils are proud of their school and treat their very attractive environment with the utmost respect. Positive relationships between pupils and those who teach and care for them are the norm; pupils work and socialise very well with each other. Behaviour continues to be outstanding; inspectors witnessed no disruption to learning whatsoever during the visit. The school's monitoring records indicate that this is typical.

You are determined that pupils should enjoy the widest possible range of experiences outside of the classroom, and that these help prepare them for independent or semi-independent living. Pupils enjoy engaging in a range of residential trips, including to France and the USA, and overnight stays in the on-site bungalow. Within school, pupils make a significant contribution to school life in a number of ways, including through their membership of the elected School Council and work-related activity. Participation in activities such as the 'Evening of the Arts', street dance or the school choir help accelerate pupils' personal development.

At the last inspection, inspectors noted similar strengths. They also commended leaders for ensuring that the curriculum met individual pupils' needs, and found that high expectations and effective teaching ensured that pupils of all ages made good or better progress. Inspectors noted the school's excellent on-site medical provision, personal care and arrangements for keeping pupils safe and secure.

In the previous inspection report, inspectors identified that teachers' checks on pupils' progress during lessons could be improved, to ensure that individuals receive swift support, or challenge, to move them forward in their learning. Since the previous inspection, leaders have ensured that:

- Teachers provide all pupils with the most appropriate means to communicate their understanding, including through the use of technology such as tablet computers, switches and eye movement recognition systems. This means that all can show what they have learned, including those whose ability to speak, or to move without assistance, is limited.
- Teachers and teaching assistants plan activities for each pupil very carefully, based upon their understanding of what they already know and can do. They ensure any support individuals need to complete work successfully is provided.

- This information is returned to regularly during lessons and recorded precisely. This means teachers and teaching assistants constantly update their understanding of how much progress individuals are making; they change the tasks pupils are doing as necessary so that they can move forward in their learning. As a result, all groups of pupils are making even more rapid progress than was the case at the time of the previous inspection.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders have ensured that all the necessary safeguarding checks are in place and that policies are up to date. Records show that staff are appropriately and regularly trained to recognise and report child protection concerns. Documentary evidence shows that referrals of concerns to other agencies are timely and meticulous. Liaison with parents and community services ensures that medical concerns are followed up as quickly as possible. The level of care given to pupils and the range of ways they are given to communicate their thoughts and feelings enables them to feel safe at school. The 'keep safe' curriculum ensures pupils have a good understanding of how to minimise risks, including those involved in using the internet.

Inspection findings

- You have developed new and clearly-defined leadership roles as the school has grown, as well as the capacity of existing staff to fulfil them. Middle leaders are monitoring standards, and ensuring that school policies are applied consistently. Leaders at all levels communicate regularly and effectively. This means any problems are identified and addressed quickly. The progress made by individual pupils is tracked very carefully; any who need it receive appropriate additional support and challenge. Leaders check the impact of this intervention and make changes if necessary.
- Leaders and teachers research and try different ways in which to teach and support pupils with particular needs, such as those with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and insist that the impact of these approaches upon pupils' progress is evaluated carefully. All staff are supported to develop teaching techniques that are found to be effective; they are also held accountable for pupils' progress by senior leaders, and expectations are universally high. As a result, the quality of teaching continues to improve, as does its impact on pupils' outcomes. All groups of pupils make at least good and often exceptional progress given their starting points.
- Some pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are making far more rapid progress than at the time of the previous inspection because staff have been trained to use a physical development programme. This has developed the physical abilities of many pupils considerably. Pupils also learn how to use information communications technology applications at the school's 'Tech Base.' As a result, many can

now use communication aids to show their teachers what they can do. This means teachers can gauge individuals' levels of understanding and so plan activities for these pupils that are suitably challenging.

- Pupils are set demanding targets that relate to their personal development needs as well as to their work in class. Staff help pupils to make their own choices, and to work by themselves, whenever possible. This enables many to prepare well for independent or semi-independent living in the future.
- Teaching deepens learning, promotes engagement and provokes enjoyment. It is often inspirational. In one lesson during the inspection, pupils with little ability to communicate explored a range of textures, including ice cream, jelly and pasta and were very well supported to use communication aids. This enabled them to express and explain their likes and dislikes non-verbally and with great clarity. During a science lesson, pupils of all abilities were able to grasp new concepts because teachers and teaching assistants ensured each benefited from well-tailored support.
- Leaders are ensuring that pupils develop the kinds of skills that will help them in everyday life and in employment. This is building pupils' confidence and ability to interact positively with others both within and outside of the school community. Leaders have also increased the range of work placements available to pupils, ensuring that these are a good match for their needs, abilities and interests.
- Leaders help pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour very effectively, often by helping those with limited language to communicate effectively and by ensuring that all staff use the best strategies to ensure this. As a result, individuals are able to stay within, or make a swift and productive return to, their normal classes without disrupting the work of others. Pupils benefit from very positive relationships and excellent teaching; they respond by demonstrating an exceptional commitment to learning and great resilience if they initially find something difficult.
- Governors know the school well. They visit regularly to assure themselves that pupils are making good progress and are well cared for. Governors support innovations both in teaching techniques and to the curriculum; this has resulted in a broadening of the range of courses available to sixth form pupils. Governors ensure that all staff are able to complete additional research and qualifications. This has, for example, helped teaching assistants to meet pupils' needs expertly; it has also enabled several to gain qualified teacher status. As a result, the school has been able to expand without facing difficulties in recruiting or retaining able staff.
- Leaders and governors recognise that the school's continued growth, developments in education and employment, and ongoing changes to the composition of the pupil body necessitate a re-evaluation of the school's vision and ethos. They are also reviewing the most effective ways of

recording the wide range of pupils' achievements. Although this work has started, it remains in its early stages.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that they:

- continue the work that has already been started to redefine the school's vision and further develop the ways of recording pupils' achievements, so that the leaders' unremitting expectations and the changing needs of pupils are addressed
- celebrate and share their outstanding practice widely.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Cambridgeshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jason Howard
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and other senior and middle leaders, teachers and governors. We visited a number of classes, spoke to pupils and staff and, where relevant, looked at pupils' work. We observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. Inspectors looked at a range of assessments of pupils' achievements, and scrutinised improvement plans and leaders' evaluation of the school's work. We reviewed safeguarding records and information relating to behaviour and attendance. Because there were too few views from parents expressed on Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, inspectors looked at the results of the school's own survey and spoke to parents as they arrived at the school to bring and collect their children.