

Meadowcroft School

24 Bar Lane, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1 4AD

Inspection dates

21–23 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Adequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has a very clear vision for the future of the school. Staff and other leaders share her vision and this has enabled the school to move forward at a fast pace since the last inspection.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is continuing to improve because senior leaders carry out rigorous checks on work in the classroom and in pupils' books.
- Staff work closely together to plan learning which matches pupils' individual needs. This enables pupils to make good or better academic progress across the school.
- Older pupils make better progress in mathematics than in English. This is because they are not given sufficient opportunity to write longer pieces of work.
- The proprietors work closely with leaders to ensure that the independent school standards are met.
- Overall pupils behave well and they feel and are safe. Staff are highly skilled at recognising pupils' complex behavioural needs and work hard to recognise and remove the barriers which reduce pupils' ability to learn.
- The curriculum offered on both school sites is enriched with a wide range of opportunities for pupils to follow their interests and gain new skills. Eight pupils recently gained the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award and six gained a much-prized Diamond Award.
- Post-16 students make equally good progress to others in the school, often making up for previously missed time. They leave with a range of accreditations and qualifications.
- Pupils' attendance has continued to improve since the previous inspection. Some pupils arrive in school having been out of education for several years. School leaders are aware that there is more to be done to improve attendance further, particularly to engage hard-to-reach families.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement in English for key stage 4 and post-16 students by:
 - requiring pupils to undertake longer pieces of writing in English lessons
 - exposing pupils to experience a range of different writing styles in order that they may broaden their understanding and increase their proficiency at writing for a range of purposes.
- Improve the attendance of the most vulnerable pupils by increasing the role undertaken by the family support officer in working with harder to engage families.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and the headteacher have a very clear vision for the future of the school and have made it a priority to ensure that the independent school standards are fully met. The headteacher understands the needs of the pupils well and works ceaselessly to improve their experience of school. As a result, the school provides a nurturing environment in which pupils are able to succeed socially, emotionally and academically.
- The school has a well-ordered and calm atmosphere. Staff form a cohesive team which enables them to provide a consistent approach to meeting pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs. Regular meetings at the end of each day ensure that information about pupils' behaviour and attitudes is passed on to relevant staff. This also enables effective actions to be planned for the next day.
- Senior leaders are honest and accurate in their evaluation of the strengths of the school. Plans for further improvement build on these identified strengths, but also recognise the challenges the school faces, for example, in recruiting the quality of staff they feel to be necessary in core subjects. Leaders' clear focus on finding a solution to every challenge is one of the key drivers behind the improvement in outcomes for pupils since the previous inspection.
- The deputy headteacher has ensured a robust system to track and measure that pupils' progress is in place. He has also developed an effective system to measure pupils' progress over time and to set challenging future targets. Combined with regular meetings with individual staff, these systems ensure that leaders have a clear understanding of the progress made by pupils across the school.
- The curriculum offered across both school sites is highly individualised and is closely tailored to pupils' needs. While the curriculum is closely aligned to the national curriculum, opportunities to pursue a more vocational curriculum have recently been extended. Pupils spoken with said how much they enjoy learning how to repair and rebuild a motorbike, and how to prepare the land at the school's allotment for planting seeds. They recognise that this prepares them well for the future.
- Staff recognise that pupils often arrive in school with a low level of self-esteem. Participating in a wide range of outdoor activities enables pupils to recognise what they can achieve. For example, the school has a well-established programme of outdoor pursuits, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Eight pupils have been exceptionally successful at gaining this award at the highest level and are excitedly anticipating visiting Buckingham Palace to collect their awards. A comment made by one pupil summed up the views of all, 'This is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I am so proud of myself.' Experiences such as these contribute well to pupils' gains in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.
- Visitors to the school from a range of organisations, including the police, enable pupils to develop a strong understanding of modern Britain and how they can make a worthwhile contribution to society.

- School leaders work hard to improve the attendance of all pupils. Current data shows that the vast majority of pupils have made good gains in improving their attendance since joining the school. Currently, there is only one parent support officer working at the school. Plans to appoint a second are in place. However, the post has not yet been filled. This has reduced the time available to engage with hard-to-reach parents.
- The school's website ensures that the safeguarding policy is readily available and is accessible for parents and carers.

Governance

- The proprietor offers school leaders good levels of support and challenge through regular visits to school and discussions around the company's key performance indicators.
- The proprietor has recently commissioned an external adviser to carry out an audit of the school's work. The headteacher has taken the immediate action suggested in the school improvement report. This clearly demonstrates her continuing quest for further improvement.
- While many systems in place directly reflect the ethos and values of the company, the proprietor has encouraged the headteacher to develop the school to meet the specific needs of pupils. For example, the recent development of a well-resourced area for pupils to learn life skills has benefited pupils with the greatest need to make progress towards independent living.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff spoken with during the inspection have a very clear knowledge and understanding of recent legislation. They receive regular training and updates.
- Meetings held at the end of each school day ensure that safeguarding information is shared with all relevant staff. Incidents are recorded electronically and are constantly reviewed by the headteacher, who is the designated safeguarding lead on one site. Inspection analysis of recorded incidents showed that actions taken in the event of a safeguarding issue are measured and relevant. Records also demonstrate the school's close working partnerships with other professionals.
- Pupils' safety and security are at the heart of all the school does. This ethos is clearly reflected in the diligence shown by staff in the event of a pupil's absence. Not only is a call made to a pupil's home but it is often followed up by a visit from a staff member. In the event of the pupil not willing to come to school, the staff member will remain and work with the pupil at home, ensuring that lost learning time is minimised.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall. Pupils make good progress from a range of different starting points because most work planned engages and interests them.

- A bespoke approach is taken in most lessons across the school, which means that pupils often have individually tailored tasks. This enables pupils to catch up with previously missed learning and to build their current learning on more sound foundations.
- Staff cooperate closely to plan work for pupils. Their detailed knowledge of pupils' needs enables them to target support carefully. This enables them to respond skilfully when pupils are in danger of losing focus or start to behave less well. This also enables learning to continue with minimum disruption for others in the classroom.
- When learning is at its best, pupils are engaged and interested and are given the opportunity to think about their responses. These higher-level skills are well promoted across the school, but were particularly noticeable in the primary classroom where staff have very well-developed questioning skills, which fully engage younger pupils.
- Teachers, overall, have good subject knowledge and high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This ensures that all pupils, including the most able, make good progress over time. This could clearly be seen in a design technology lesson where pupils were learning wallpapering skills. Pupils showed impressive levels of concentration as they accurately matched the pattern repeat and painstakingly cut edges to fit following the teacher's skilful example.
- Pupils make better progress in mathematics than in English overall. This is because English work planned for older pupils does not always offer sufficient challenge and stimulus to inspire their writing. Too frequently, work set does not give pupils sufficient opportunity to write longer pieces of work. These shortcomings slow pupils' progress overall.
- Leaders and teachers assess pupils' work regularly and accurately. They take into account pupils' previous learning and the subsequent targets set enable pupils to make good progress over time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils who arrive in school make good progress both academically, socially and emotionally. School leaders recognise that progress in both areas is closely linked and that academic progress is only possible if pupils change their attitudes and behaviour. Support from both staff and the therapy team helps pupils to feel well supported and cared for, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Pupils spoken with during the inspection said they feel safe and cared for well. Comments about staff and school included, 'It feels like home' and 'Staff here understand me.' Comments made by parents through Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, confirmed that parents also believe their children are safe and well cared for and make good progress.
- Pupils make good gains in developing strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. They are given many opportunities to develop an understanding of right from wrong and also, through fundraising activities, develop an understanding of the need to support those less fortunate than themselves.

- School staff work closely with pupils when they attend classes at Biketrain, the alternative provider used by the school. This ensures the same good care and guidance offered as in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Overall, both the school sites are calm and orderly. Most pupils display positive attitudes to learning, both on the school site and when attending lessons off-site. They recognise that school is a place to learn and those spoken to described how gaining qualifications was essential for their future.
- Pupils who attend this school often have very high levels of need. Staff are skilled in recognising when incidents are likely to occur and steer pupils carefully towards learning how to control their own behaviour. This skilful approach, coupled with a strong focus on developing pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence, has contributed to an overall reduction in the numbers of incidents since the last inspection.
- Overall attendance has improved by more than 20% overall. Improving it still further is a high priority for senior leaders. They have developed good relationships with parents overall, but leaders recognise they have more work to do in engaging harder-to-reach parents. Plans in place include using the services of a second parent support officer and a parent volunteer to undertake home visits. However, these planned actions have not yet been put in place.
- Pupils' behaviour when they attend the Biketrain is equally as good as when they attend school. Their attendance at Biketrain is similar to that in school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils typically join the school with gaps in their knowledge and understanding, often as a result of time spent away from school due to their social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Assessments carried out when pupils arrive enable staff to identify where pupils need extra help to catch up. An individualised curriculum is then put in place, which enables pupils to work successfully towards this aim.
- Some pupils have additional learning difficulties. These are quickly identified and extra help is put in place. This enables these pupils to make good progress over time.
- The most able pupils are offered support to help them to make faster progress. Staff have high expectations for this group and planned work reflects this level of challenge. Work in pupils' books provides further evidence to support this.
- Leaders are passionate about ensuring that pupils make up lost learning time. Sometimes, pupils experience further crises in their lives which can impact on their desire to attend school. If this happens, staff bring school to them ensuring that they engage in learning wherever they are.
- Overall, pupils make better progress in mathematics and science than in English. Leaders are aware of this and plans are in place to improve pupils' achievement in English.

- Pupils spoken with say they enjoy reading. Resources in the primary section of the school support this well. Opportunities to read and write are also in place within the newly built mobile classroom on the school's allotment. This more informal environment offers pupils good opportunities to practise their reading skills, as well as improving their understanding of horticulture.
- Leaders recognise that it is not always possible in the time available for pupils to reach levels of attainment in line with those expected nationally for their age. However, they also recognise the importance of accreditations and qualifications, and of ensuring that all pupils leave school with as many of these as possible. This successful strategy ensured that all pupils who left at the end of the last academic year made a successful transfer to placements in further education, apprenticeship or the workplace. Recent school records show they are all still following their chosen pathways.
- Although the school does not always directly receive the pupil premium funding, leaders ensure that progress for this group is equally as good as for others in school and is close to others nationally.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The school accepts students in Years 12, 13 and 14, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The curriculum they follow is designed to enable them to catch up, often after missing years of their education.
- Students learn alongside pupils in key stage 4 and leave once they have attained sufficient qualifications or accreditation to follow their chosen career pathway.
- Many have additional learning needs. These pupils follow a curriculum, which, as well as developing their English and mathematical skills, also develops their life skills. This prepares them well for living independently.
- Teaching, learning and assessment for these pupils is of the same good quality as others in the school.
- Leadership of the sixth form provision is undertaken by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. As a result, leadership and management of sixth form provision is of the same good quality as in other areas of the school.
- Pupils of sixth-form age benefit from the same good care, guidance and support as their peers. This supports their good personal development and well-being, ensuring that they are safe and increasingly behave well.

School details

Unique reference number	135216
DfE registration number	384/6348
Inspection number	10025959

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education
Chair	Acorn Care and Education
Headteacher	Lynette Edwards
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,000
Telephone number	01924 366 242
Website	www.meadowcroftschoo.com
Email address	info@meadowcroftschoo.com
Date of previous inspection	4–6 February 2014

Information about this school

- Meadowcroft School is an independent special school which aims to meet the needs of pupils between the ages of five and 19 who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some also have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder and associated learning difficulties.
- The school is registered for 60 pupils and opened in 2007. It currently operates from two sites: one on the outskirts of Wakefield and the other in the centre of Wakefield in premises that was previously an art gallery.
- The school was last inspected in February 2014.
- At the time of the inspection there were 43 pupils on roll, all of whom had a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Each pupil is referred and funded by a placing local authority and the school currently provides for pupils from five different local authorities.
- The school uses one external provider, Biketrain, to deliver lessons on motorbike and car maintenance and repair.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of staff changes, including the internal appointments of a deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher.
- Meadowcroft School is part of the Acorn Care and Education group.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out a learning walk with senior leaders.
- The inspector also reviewed a wide range of documentation provided by the school including documents relating to the curriculum, safeguarding, the behaviour policy and the school's system for measuring the progress pupils make.
- During the inspection, meetings were held with senior leaders, school staff, pupils and two members of the therapy team.
- A scrutiny of work was carried out alongside senior leaders. Off-site visits were made to a provider of motorbike maintenance and the school's allotment. Observations of pupils learning were made at both sites.
- The inspector took into account the views expressed by a parent spoken to by telephone, as well as the 26 staff who completed the Ofsted questionnaire.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017