

The Meadows School

Whitworth Lane, Spennymoor DL16 7QW

Inspection dates

28 February–1 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders, including governors, acknowledge that there is insufficient capacity, in terms of time, at both senior and middle leadership levels. As a result, some staff training needs are unmet and school improvement planning lacks rigour.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. Not all teachers have high enough expectations of their pupils. Too often, the work that teachers set does not match pupils' abilities. As a result, their progress is not rapid enough.
- Learning support assistants are not consistently well deployed. Sometimes they provide too much support for pupils. Consequently, pupils do not develop the determination to 'have a go' quickly enough.
- Pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the vast majority of whom are disadvantaged, do not make sufficient progress from their individual starting points to achieve well in English and mathematics.
- While leaders and staff ensure that pupils are safe, administrative systems and procedures do not support this work well.
- Leaders acknowledge that, although improving, pupils' attendance is too low and too many pupils are persistently absent.
- Leaders, including governors, do not have a clear understanding of the impact of the school's use of additional funding such as the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy.

The school has the following strengths

- There has been a significant reduction in the number of pupils who are excluded for a fixed term from school. Pupils behave well. They are ready to learn and make up for the periods of absence before they joined the school.
- Pupils appreciate the care and support given by staff. They are proud of the school and were exceptional ambassadors for the school during the inspection.
- Careers information, advice and guidance are strong. Pupils experience a wide range of work-related activities. The vast majority of pupils access further education and maintain their placements when they leave the school.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is underpinned well by the school's 'Big 4' framework.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers have the very highest expectations of pupils
 - planned work matches pupils' needs and abilities
 - learning support assistants provide just the right amount of support to enable pupils to become more independent learners.
- Further improve pupils' attendance and reduce the number of those who are persistently absent.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders at all levels have the capacity, in terms of time, to fulfil their duties
 - improvement planning includes targets against which leaders and governors can evaluate progress
 - administrative procedures and systems, especially in relation to safeguarding, are tightened, understood and adhered to.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The senior leadership team has been severely depleted over an 18-month period owing to the substantive deputy headteacher's secondments. The assistant headteacher is acting as deputy headteacher. Governors and senior leaders have not filled the vacant assistant headteacher's post. As a result, there is insufficient capacity, in terms of time, for senior leaders to carry out their roles effectively.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is too generous. For example, there is no acknowledgement in the school's self-evaluation of its own effectiveness, or in the school's improvement planning, of the need to increase capacity at senior leadership level.
- The headteacher, who is a highly skilled educational psychologist, is also the coordinator for special educational needs. She has identified, and has the skills and knowledge to deliver, the additional training that staff require. However, the demands of other work have meant she has not had the time to do so.
- The headteacher identified correctly that pupils do not make sufficient progress from their individual starting points in English and mathematics. The subject leader for English confirmed the headteacher's analysis and said pupils' progress is hampered by very low reading ages, long periods out of school prior to admittance and poor attendance at The Meadows. Leaders have taken sound action to improve pupils' reading ages. All pupils and staff read together every day. The headteacher states firmly that 'reading is everybody's business'.
- Middle leadership, which is subject leadership at The Meadows School, is not well developed. Actions to improve pupils' progress in English and mathematics are not planned consistently well. Similarly, the evaluation of the impact of actions and initiatives to bring about improvement lacks rigour.
- The impact of additional government funding, including the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy, is not monitored rigorously enough. Pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the vast majority of whom are disadvantaged, do not make the progress of which they are capable from their individual starting points.
- Leaders appreciate the support provided by the local authority, particularly in relation to the development of leaders' ability to check on the quality of teaching and learning effectively. Very recently, an officer of the local authority identified the need for the requirements of 'Keeping children safe in education' 2016 to be incorporated fully into the school's policies. However, leaders had not acted on this advice prior to the inspection.
- Despite capacity issues, the headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher are working hard to improve the school further. They have had a great deal of success in creating the right conditions for learning, improving pupils' behaviour and ensuring they are ready to learn.
- The acting deputy headteacher has developed and implemented a matrix that gives a visual representation of individual teachers' strengths and areas for further

development. Senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching thoroughly through carrying out formal observations of teaching, checks of pupils' work and learning walks throughout the school. They provide effective feedback to teachers about how to develop their teaching further.

- The school's 'Big 4' aims (think and reflect, take responsibility, manage challenge and connect with others) underpin pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education successfully. Pupils develop a real sense of community during their time in the school. They empathise with those less fortunate than themselves and take part willingly in a number of charitable events each year.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Key subjects such as English, mathematics and science are supplemented well by more vocational activities. Pupils from Years 7 and 8 access community-based enterprise activities on a weekly basis. All Year 9, 10 and 11 pupils take part in vocational activities such as bricklaying or food preparation. Pupils value these opportunities, which prepare them for life after school.
- Careers information, advice and guidance are growing in strength. Almost all of the Year 11 leavers in 2016 accessed post-16 provision. The school tracks their progress carefully. The vast majority had maintained their placement by January 2017.
- Fundamental British values, such as the rule of law and democracy, are addressed well within tutor group time every morning. Tutor groups include pupils from every year group. Pupils grow in confidence while interacting with their peers. They learn how to socialise, communicate and help others with their learning.

Governance of the school

- Governors have not ensured that senior and subject leaders have the capacity, in terms of time, to fulfil their roles effectively. Recently, governors met with senior officers from Durham local authority to address this issue.
- Governors are aware of gaps in their skills. They have actively recruited an additional governor with the required skills set. As a result, governors have an improved understanding of their need to hold leaders to account robustly for additional government funding such as the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding for literacy and numeracy.
- Governors carry out their strategic role through regular visits to the school. They check diligently on the areas of the school's improvement planning for which they have responsibility.
- Governors know that pupils' behaviour is improving because of the information provided to them regularly by the headteacher. They understand that leaders have created the conditions necessary for pupils to learn and are pleased that pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress in mathematics.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils feel safe and secure in the school, and their parents agree.

- The school's record of staff recruitment checks is fully compliant. However, the administrative systems and procedures in relation to the recruitment of teachers are not robust enough.
- The headteacher, as designated person for child protection, has a comprehensive knowledge of the pupils and their families. She ensures that all staff are aware of safeguarding concerns during the daily briefing session.
- The school works proactively with a wide range of agencies and providers to ensure that vulnerable pupils access the necessary support and expertise in a timely manner.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across key stages and within subjects.
- Leaders and teachers do not deploy learning support assistants consistently well. Some learning support assistants provide too much support for individual pupils. These pupils become over-reliant on the support. As a result, they do not develop the skills to become independent learners rapidly enough.
- Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of the pupils. They do not use their assessments of pupils' achievements to identify exactly what pupils need to learn next. They set work that is too easy and pupils lose interest.
- However, some teachers do have high expectations of their pupils and this is clear from pupils' responses and from their work. In mathematics, for example, practical lessons where pupils have to solve real-life problems (such as by using Pythagoras' theorem to calculate an area) inspire pupils to do their best and to learn new vocabulary.
- Teachers deliver literacy and numeracy skills well during daily tutor group periods. Leaders have identified that pupils are making better progress in reading because they have an opportunity to practise their skills daily in tutor group time.
- Pupils are interested and engaged during art and design 'enterprise' lessons. Staff model new skills well and pupils apply their new learning confidently. Pupils use their ever-increasing knowledge to build up high-quality products over a series of lessons. They check their work carefully and assess the progress they have made 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. Leaders have created an ethos of trust and support. Pupils are eager to learn and anxious to acquire new skills. A parent reported that their child 'always comes home with a much more positive attitude'.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe from harm. A pupil, in a letter to the inspection team, wrote 'I feel safe here.' Pupils know the rules for staying safe online and report that they are taught about online safety 'constantly'. Pupils do not give out

personal details. They use privacy settings appropriately.

- Pupils understand and can explain the different forms that bullying can take. They say bullying is rare in school.
- Pupils are supportive of each other and very understanding of each other's individual differences. However, key stage 3 pupils report that there are instances of homophobic name-calling. They are confident that teachers tackle such incidents promptly and rigorously.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Leaders, teachers and pupils value the effective work of the 'solutions-focused therapist'.
- Pupils appreciate the provision of the 'Take 5' room. They are happy to access the room for short periods of time in the company of a trusted adult. As a result, they calm down quickly and become receptive to learning once again.
- The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced dramatically. There has only been one fixed-term exclusion since the beginning of the academic year. The reduction in exclusions mirrors the improvement in pupils' behaviour.
- In addition, the number of physical restraints, which the headteacher described as 'uncomfortably high', is reducing over time. Pupils told an inspector that they understand why physical restraints are used. One said he was 'kept safe' by a physical restraint when he was being disruptive.
- Pupils' attendance is improving. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is decreasing.
- Pupils who attend the personalised alternative curriculum centre make some progress to achieve accreditations in literacy and numeracy. Four of the six pupils who currently attend the centre have low attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over time, pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, have not made consistently strong progress from their individual starting points in English and mathematics.
- Assessment information in the school's tracking system indicates that pupils currently in school are not making strong enough progress, from their individual starting points, in English and mathematics. This is true for those pupils who joined the school at the beginning of Year 7 and those who were admitted later in the year.
- The school's assessment information also indicates that pupils with higher prior attainment, the most able pupils, make more rapid progress than pupils with low prior attainment.
- Pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress in mathematics. Innovative initiatives, such as the awarding of 'MATHIA' hoodies have captured pupils' interest. Hoodies are awarded to pupils who teachers deem to be 'mathematics pupils of the month'. Pupils wear the hoodies they have been awarded with pride.

- The most successful subject at GCSE is art. Pupils' attainment in art is higher than in all other subjects over time.
- Data supplied by the school for some pupils indicates that daily reading sessions, within tutor group lessons, are leading to pupils making significant gains in their reading ages. For example, out of seven Year 7 pupils, four made gains of nine or more months over a three-month period.
- All pupils achieved an accreditation in English and mathematics in 2015 and 2016. In 2016, 95% of the Year 11 cohort achieved a vocationally related qualification in preparation for work. Both aspects help pupils to prepare successfully for the next stage of their education or their future lives.

School details

Unique reference number	131905
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10001095

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angela Lamb
Headteacher	Sarah Took
Telephone number	01388 811178
Website	www.themeadowsschool.info
Email address	themeadows@durhamlearning.net
Date of previous inspection	9–10 October 2012

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding on its website.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for support through pupil premium funding, is well above average.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The vast majority of pupils are boys of White British heritage and speak English as their first language.
- Six pupils attend off-site training at the personalised alternative curriculum centre, which is based at another Durham local authority special school.

- The substantive deputy headteacher is seconded to another school in Durham local authority. The assistant headteacher is acting deputy headteacher. The assistant headteacher's post is vacant.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across a wide range of subjects in all year groups. Observations, on both days of the inspection, were carried out jointly with the headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work to find out more about how well they were learning. An inspector read with three Year 7 and two Year 8 pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Formal meetings were held with a group of key stage 3 pupils and a group of key stage 4 pupils. Inspectors took account of a letter received from a pupil.
- Additional meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders and governors.
- The lead inspector talked by telephone to the school's education development partner and a member of staff at Durham local authority's personalised alternative curriculum centre.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school more broadly and looked at a range of documentation. This included policies, the school's improvement plan, data about pupils' attendance and safeguarding records.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to be taken into account. Inspectors considered the school's own surveys of staff and parents' views.

Inspection team

Belita Scott, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Judith James

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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