

# River Mead School

Lowbourn, Melksham, Wiltshire SN12 7ED

## Inspection dates

23–24 January 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The executive headteacher leads with a relentless ambition for excellence. She has successfully steered the school through challenging times.
- Staff training and subject support networks facilitated by The Mead Academy Trust are leading to continually improving standards. Staff morale is high. The headteacher has developed a motivated team who share her insatiable appetite for improvement.
- Leaders' high expectations and well-targeted challenge and support have resulted in improved teaching which is securely good.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding. Consequently, the differences between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally are diminishing.
- Leaders implement a high-quality curriculum which promotes pupils' achievement across a range of subjects very well. However, leadership of some of the non-core subjects such as modern foreign languages (MFL), PE and music are just developing.
- Teachers make effective use of what they know pupils can do and understand to plan learning that helps pupils to make good progress.
- River Mead is a nurturing haven of aspiration. Pupils feel safe to make mistakes and are eager to learn from them. They demonstrate pride in their learning and show an appetite to learn.
- Teachers engender a love of reading. This, and the strong teaching of phonics have resulted in above national average standards at the end of key stage 1.
- Exclusions have been high in the past. However, they are significantly reduced. Pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school.
- Teaching in mathematics has led to pupils' much improved ability to reason and solve problems. However, sometimes pupils' lack of fluency and recall of number facts slows down their ability to calculate efficiently and accurately.
- Teaching in the resource base supports pupils' learning very well. They make good progress against their goals. However, their development of mathematical understanding is less secure than other aspects of learning.
- Although pupils' attendance has improved, there are still too many of the younger pupils who are persistently absent from school.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all leaders implement best practice, already in the school, when monitoring teaching and learning.
- Further improve teaching and pupils' outcomes by ensuring that:
  - teaching in mathematics enables pupils to recall facts efficiently and accurately when solving a range of mathematical problems
  - pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan make as good progress in mathematics as in their literacy skills.
- Improve pupils' personal development and welfare by making sure that more pupils attend school regularly.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The executive headteacher has an unwavering commitment to providing a caring and inclusive school. Learning and aspiration are at the very heart of the school with equality of opportunity running through its veins. Leaders have created a cohesive team which shares the trust's mission to 'teach children to dream, strive, achieve and celebrate and to be the best they can be'.
- Leaders have an acute understanding of the school's current effectiveness and improvement priorities. They have put in place clear, ambitious plans for improvement which are continually evaluated and monitored. Consequently, previous weaknesses have been remedied. Pupils are making good progress across the school.
- Leaders make sure that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is having a positive impact on both their academic achievement and emotional well-being. As a result, current pupils can overcome barriers to their learning. There is no marked difference in the attainment of these pupils compared to others.
- The leadership of English is shared between phonics, reading and writing leads. Together they have devised a highly effective and cohesive approach which develops pupils' oracy, reading and writing skills.
- The trust's inclusion lead provides dynamic leadership. Historically, too few pupils had their needs identified and assessed. Over the past few years, the special educational needs team have implemented effective staff training so that pupils' needs are accurately identified and supported.
- There is an expectation that all leaders take responsibility for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The inclusion lead works closely with the resource base to ensure that the pupils' complex needs are met both within the base and in the mainstream classes. This work has been highly effective in developing pupils' literacy skills and their personal and social education. Resource base leaders implement rigorous monitoring procedures and act swiftly to enhance provision.
- Leaders recognised that pupils' achievement in mathematics was weaker than in English. The school's chosen approach to remedying this weakness is highly effective. The high-quality support for teachers provided by the leader for mathematics has led to a steep rise in pupils' understanding and ability to solve problems. Mathematics is integrated across other aspects of the curriculum well. Leaders are now beginning to tackle weaknesses in pupils' fluency in mathematics.
- Leaders have welcomed local authority support and challenge. This work has enabled the school's ongoing improvement.
- Leaders implement a high-quality curriculum with a broad range of experiences to add meaning to pupils' learning. Leaders base this on a clearly identified rationale for the curriculum design, which identifies long-term goals for pupils. This prepares pupils well for the wider world, including enabling them to learn about the importance of fundamental British values.

- Subject leaders for non-core subjects such as humanities, music, modern foreign languages and PE are now in the early stages of evaluating the effectiveness of work in their subjects.
- The vast majority of the parents and carers who responded to Parent View would recommend the school.

### **Governance of the school**

- Trustees and local governors on the academy advisory board display a firm commitment to the school. They have effective links with senior and middle leaders to keep informed of the school's progress towards its improvement priorities. Minutes of their meetings and visits to the school reflect an in-depth understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have, in partnership with school leaders, correctly identified the school's priorities and set effective plans in place for improvement.
- Trustees are not complacent. They commission regular school effectiveness visits with a local authority consultant to secure an external view of the school's effectiveness. As a result, the board have been able to allocate resources and provide support and challenge so that the school's effectiveness has been strengthened over time.
- Trustees manage school finances wisely. They are effective in holding the school to account for its spending of additional funding. For example, the pupil premium is well accounted for and is making a discernible difference to the progress of eligible pupils.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Through her strong resolve, the headteacher has ensured that a culture of safeguarding and well-being is at the heart of the school and all decision-making. Leaders ensure that all staff are trained well and kept up to date on safeguarding issues. All staff demonstrate vigilance in reporting concerns.
- Leaders with specific responsibilities for safeguarding are diligent in carrying out their duties. They are unremitting in their work with other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support they need. A caring and thoughtful response is given to any pupil in need.
- Leaders are vigilant in checking the suitability of any adult who is likely to work with pupils. Trust leaders and academy advisory board representatives make careful checks to ensure that policies and procedures are followed diligently. Leaders make sure that new staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities from the outset.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- As a result of the leadership team's relentless drive to raise pupils' attainment, the quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good.
- Teachers have a well-informed understanding of pupils' aptitudes and circumstances. Teaching has successfully closed gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding caused by previous weak teaching.

- In addition, teachers make effective use of assessment to feed back to pupils. Teaching staff make effective use of their questioning skills to encourage pupils to think. Over time, this approach has empowered pupils to persevere in their learning.
- Teachers have high expectations of both the quality and quantity of pupils' writing. Pupils develop confidence at writing for different purposes. Pupils use ambitious vocabulary and a wide range of punctuation to produce work which is interesting and lively.
- The teaching of reading is a strength of the school. Teachers promote a culture for reading and engender a love of books. The school's increased focus on developing pupils' exposure to high-quality reading material has paid dividends. This, alongside the systematic approach to the teaching of phonics, has led to improved standards of reading across the school.
- Sequences of teaching in mathematics are well thought out and this enables pupils to become confident in solving mathematical problems. However, pupils' ability to calculate fluently and accurately is sometimes marred by their weaker knowledge of number.
- Teachers provide effective support for pupils with SEND. Good-quality guidance and care help these pupils to develop confidence. Consequently, pupils make good progress against their individual targets. Progress in pupils' literacy skills is particularly strong. The school's SEN leadership team ably supports teachers to ensure that targets are succinct, and teachers are rigorous in making sure pupils understand what they need to do to improve.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the school. They are briefed well and know specifically how to promote pupils' learning. As a result, they make a significant contribution to pupils' learning, personal development and welfare. Teachers and teaching assistants establish warm and supportive relationships with pupils. Consequently, pupils feel safe to make mistakes and persevere in lessons.
- Teachers make good use of their strong subject knowledge to help pupils to make good progress in many subjects. Teachers are well supported by subject leaders to this end. However, currently, the teaching of modern foreign languages is not as consistent across key stage 2 as other subjects. Leaders have identified this and have plans in place to remedy this situation.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils' safety and welfare are at the heart of this school's work. Leaders and teachers provide strong pastoral care. Pupils are confident that they can go to any adult if they have concerns.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare. They have confidence in staff to sort out any issues quickly. Most parents also reported that bullying was not an issue in school. A small proportion of parents expressed some concerns. However, inspectors did not find any evidence to support these views. Pupils work and play well together. Inspectors found

that pupils feel safe and evidence showed that staff look after them well.

- Pupils say that they feel safe. They gain a thorough understanding of how to keep safe through the school's curriculum and assemblies.
- Pupils show increasing confidence and resilience in their work to accomplish tasks. Staff model positive learning behaviours. These are reflected in the pupils' own attitudes and dispositions towards each other and their work.
- Most pupils take pride in their work and are excited by the learning and curriculum on offer. Pupils speak enthusiastically about books they have read.
- Breakfast and after-school clubs are well attended. Club leaders have created a calm and nurturing environment for pupils so that pupils get a good start and end to the day.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff consistently apply the school's behaviour policy. This reinforces positive behaviour so that pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils enjoy learning and are proud of their school. They take pride in completing and sharing their 'published' work.
- Leaders have taken effective action to improve pupils' attendance. They work with parents and carers, as well as a range of professionals, to ensure that any barriers to pupils' good attendance are reduced. A handwashing initiative was particularly successful in reducing pupils' absence. However, although improving, the number of pupils who are persistently absent from school remains too high.
- Historically, the number of incidents of poor behaviour and exclusions has been high. The implementation of a new behaviour policy meant that, for a while, the number of recorded incidents in school increased because of teachers' raised expectations. There has been a significant improvement in pupils' behaviour.

## Outcomes for pupils

**Good**

- Published achievement information for key stage 2 is not a reliable indicator of the pupils' actual achievement. This is due in part to outliers for pupils, such as those with an EHC plan. Work in pupils' books shows that pupils make consistently strong progress and are well prepared for the next stage in their education when they leave River Mead.
- Pupils' attainment over time in key stage 1 has continued to strengthen. In 2018, more pupils reached the expected standard in reading and writing than others nationally. The proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check has improved over time to be above the national average in 2018. Pupils apply their strong knowledge of phonics to their reading and their writing.
- Leaders' work on resilience is enabling pupils to grow in independence. This is supporting an increasing proportion of pupils to exceed the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics at each key stage. Work in books confirms that the

most able pupils are being challenged to reach the higher standards.

- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND make good progress. As a result of effective teaching and carefully targeted support, gaps in pupils' prior knowledge and understanding are diminishing quickly.
- Current pupils make good progress in writing. They apply spelling, punctuation and grammar rules effectively to write well-constructed sentences. They apply the wide-ranging vocabulary gained in their reading to their writing to engage the reader.

### **Early years provision**

**Good**

- Children leave the early years increasingly well prepared for Year 1.
- Leaders have invested in significant material changes to the early years learning environment. They have created safe, purposeful and vibrant areas for children to explore and learn in.
- Children have benefited from the trustees' decision to bring the Nursery, including the provision for two-year-olds, 'in house'. Children now have a seamless transition which allows them to settle quickly into school routines. Nursery provision is still in its early stages. Communication between staff is beginning to impact on children becoming better ready for their Reception Year although children's skills in reading, writing and number are less well developed than other aspects of learning.
- Adults' skilful questioning in the early years enables the children to become absorbed in activities.
- Many children join the Nursery with communication and language skills below those typical for their age. Teaching staff make language development a priority. Effective support helps children to overcome barriers to their development. As a result, children grow in confidence and are increasingly able to express themselves well. High-quality support for children with SEND enables them to make good progress particularly with their personal and social skills so that they are ready to learn.
- Teachers and adults know each child well and use the information they have to ensure that children's interests and knowledge are built upon precisely. Consequently, children regardless of starting points are motivated to learn and make strong progress.
- All adults have the highest of expectations for children's behaviour. Consequently, children interact well, form strong relationships and sustain interest in their learning.
- Leaders have created a safe and secure learning environment. All adults are trained to keep children safe. Well-considered risk assessments for activities demonstrate staff vigilance in this important work.

## School details

Unique reference number	139260
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	10053337

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	244
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Christian Checkley
Head of School	Karen Austin
Telephone number	01225 703 428
Website	<a href="http://www.rivermead.wilts.sch.uk/">www.rivermead.wilts.sch.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@rivermead.wilts.sch.uk">office@rivermead.wilts.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	12–13 July 2016

## Information about this school

- River Mead is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The school has a 20-place resource base providing specialist provision for pupils with a range of complex needs. Most of these pupils have an education, health and care plan. The local authority places these pupils.
- The school is part of The Mead Academy Trust of three primary schools in Wiltshire. It is governed by a board of trustees which has delegated some of its functions to an academy advisory group.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British, and most pupils speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is well above the national average.



- The early years foundation stage consists of an integrated unit of Nursery and Reception children.
- The school has a breakfast and after-school club run by the governing body.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils in lessons in all classes across the school, joined by senior leaders.
- Discussions took place with the executive headteacher and head of school. Meetings also took place with senior leaders from the school as well as leaders across the trust.
- Additional discussions were held with governance representatives, trustees and academy advisory board members.
- The inspectors gained the views of pupils throughout the inspection, including discussions at breaktimes.
- The inspectors looked at pupils' work in books with other leaders to establish the current quality of work in books.
- Inspectors heard pupils read in key stages 1 and 2. They also sampled pupils' knowledge of phonics in key stage 1.
- An inspector conducted a walk around the school with pupils to look at curriculum displays and the promotion of British values, and to find out how they feel about their learning.
- Inspectors met with parents at the beginning and end of both days. They also took account of three letters from parents. The 58 surveys from Parent View and corresponding 56 free-text comments were also considered by inspectors. In addition, information from staff surveys was considered.
- Inspectors scrutinised several documents, including meeting minutes, headteacher reports, governor visits and improvement plans and information relating to behaviour, safety and safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Tracy Hannon, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marcia Northeast	Ofsted Inspector
Paula Marsh	Ofsted Inspector

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