

The Meadows School

Whitworth Lane, Spennymoor DL16 7QW

Inspection dates

25 to 26 June 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Errors in the legal coding of attendance have occurred. Codes indicating that pupils were attending education in other locations have been used, when absence codes would have been accurate. As a result, leaders have little clarity as to how strong attendance is because figures are inflated.
- While staff in school teach about health issues such as smoking, some pupils smoke on the school site during the school day. Leaders do not ensure that the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is evaluated effectively.
- Governors do not yet hold school leaders fully to account, as the information that they are given is not precise. For example, they have been unable to analyse rates of absence.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent.
- Pupils' standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar, although improving, are too low by the time pupils leave Year 11. Sometimes, the most able pupils are not pushed forward in their learning consistently well enough.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders have been tenacious in improving the quality of teaching and learning at the school. As a result of improvements, most pupils now make good progress from their starting points. This includes disadvantaged pupils.
- The school has a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum. The programme and choice of subjects on offer meet the diverse range of pupils' strengths and needs.
- Leaders have continued to improve the culture at the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Since the last inspection, exclusions and the need for restrictive physical intervention have reduced. Most pupils' conduct in lessons and throughout the school is positive.
- The school has implemented a range of strategies to meet pupils' social and emotional needs. The wide range of enrichment activities helps to develop pupils' social skills well. Their personal development is good
- Parents and carers are very supportive of the school.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in education, employment or training by the time they leave The Meadows School. This is because they make strong progress in developing their social skills and attain well in a range of qualifications.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - eradicating any mistakes in the coding used to record reasons for pupils' absence
 - ensuring that information about attendance, persistent absence, and trends in behaviour is analysed effectively and impacts positively on improvement planning
 - making sure that governors have accurate information about the behaviour and personal development of pupils so that they can challenge the headteacher effectively
 - more effectively evaluating the impact of the additional funding on the progress and standards achieved by disadvantaged pupils.
- Eradicate any instances of pupils smoking onsite.
- Decrease the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent.
- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that the most able pupils are pushed forward in their learning more effectively
 - increasing teachers' focus on pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar so that the standards that they reach by the time they leave school in Year 11 strengthen.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the last inspection, leaders have significantly improved some areas of the school. Specifically, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved. The progress that pupils make from their starting points is now good. However, initiatives, policies and procedures are not all embedded to a point where the full impact can be seen in pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Some aspects of leadership and management require improvement.
- Errors in the legal coding of attendance have led to incorrect information being used for school improvement. Codes indicating that pupils were attending education in other locations have been used, when absence codes would have been accurate. As a result, leaders have little clarity as to how strong attendance is because figures are inflated.
- Leaders have not been able to use the information that they collect about pupils' attendance to help them to fully understand which strategies are working well in the school and which are less effective. As a result, their evaluation and action plan for the school is not precisely linked to areas that need most attention. They do not specifically define what difference the strategies will make to pupils' attendance. Inspectors are clear that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is too high.
- Inspectors found a lack of clarity around expectations and procedures around pupils smoking on-site.
- Leaders have developed a broad and balanced curriculum that offers experiences to meet the diverse needs of pupils at school. The curriculum offers a wide range of learning opportunities to pupils. This helps to prepare them for the next stages of their education and of their lives. The curriculum is delivered in a flexible way, adapting to the strengths of the pupils. It allows learning programmes to be personalised to meet pupils' specific needs. Pupils working in the alternative pupil transition (ATP) area of school spoke highly of the support they receive to access work-related learning.
- Leaders ensure that they assess pupils' abilities in a range of areas when they start school. This helps teachers to plan work to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils who access the ATP classes, for example, receive teaching that supports their high-level needs. As a result, these pupils have a positive view of learning and engage well in school life.
- The deputy headteacher has been at the forefront of developments in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. There have been several areas of focus. For example, the 'Stepping Stones' strategy, which focuses teachers on ensuring the support given to individual pupils in lessons, is effective. This, combined with other developments, has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching across the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils do well at this school. This is because teachers ensure that all pupils are continually 'nudged' in the right direction in classrooms. Pupils are known as individuals, and teachers effectively support their learning. However, leaders have not ensured that additional funding is sharply focused on the areas of need and, as a result, cannot evaluate the effectiveness rigorously enough.
- Leaders promote British values well throughout the school. Pupils learn about the importance of equality and are encouraged to share their views in an appropriate and

sensitive way. Consequently, pupils are confident when speaking with adults and generally respectful and tolerant of other people. Staff offer opportunities for pupils to discuss challenging topics in an environment of respect.

- Most staff feel well supported by leaders to continually improve their work. Leaders provide helpful guidance to support teachers to expand their skills and learn from their peers.

Governance of the school

- Following the last inspection, a review of governance was carried out. As a result, members of the governing body feel better equipped to support the school.
- Governors demonstrate a passionate and strong commitment to the school. They regularly attend trustees' meetings, participate in training and make frequent visits to the school.
- Governors have actively been involved in school and have challenged leaders to improve provision. The school has improved in some areas. However, they have not successfully challenged leaders to ensure that the actions to reduce persistent absence, detailed in the previous inspection report, have been implemented.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Members of staff have received training on safeguarding, which includes training on preventing radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and child protection. Staff are knowledgeable and know how to apply this training to the specific vulnerabilities of pupils in the school.
- Pupils feel safe in school. Pupils are clear that the staff at the school support them to be safe, and they know who they can talk to in the event of any concerns. However, there are concerns around the supervision of pupils when they choose to smoke on-site.
- Leaders now keep accurate records of their work to safeguard pupils, and can demonstrate a clear method for tracking concerns for individual pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is characterised by strong relationships between pupils and adults and a good level of respect shown. In classrooms, pupils focus well on the task in hand and try their best. If ever they are struggling to concentrate, they access 'Take 5', and remove themselves from the situation in order to be able to refocus on their learning.
- The 'BIG 4' priorities for the school form part of the culture in classrooms. When working, teachers ensure that pupils can connect with others in order to think and reflect and to take responsibility. Pupils are increasingly resilient in managing any challenges they receive to push them on in their learning.
- There is a higher level of consistency in the way that teachers manage learning. Teachers plan additional questions to challenge learners and expect pupils to respond

to any feedback as highlighted in specified feedback sections called 'blue boxes'.

- Each morning pupils spend time in vertical tutor groups. Through working with pupils of different ages, this time helps to ensure that pupils are calm and ready for their learning. In these sessions, teachers work with pupils of different ages and focus on literacy and numeracy development and life skills. The sessions are increasingly effective in supporting pupils' progress, although standards in spelling, punctuation and grammar are too low. The challenge for the most able pupils is also often too low, leading to slower progress being made.
- For the very weakest readers, additional phonics sessions are provided. These are taught in a systematic and effective way. The texts that are used are age appropriate. Teaching is helping to develop pupils' reading fluency and comprehension of texts.
- Teachers provide appropriate support for pupils with additional learning needs. As a result, they participate effectively in lessons and develop their understanding and skills.
- Teaching encourages pupils to develop their own opinions and to share their experiences. During the inspection, an English lesson was observed that covered themes linked to the teaching of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in primary schools. Pupils showed a deep understanding of this and related issues linked to religious beliefs. Such teaching helps to develop pupils' understanding of what it is to live in modern Britain.
- Although there are many strengths in the quality of teaching, the extent to which most-able pupils are pushed in their learning is too variable. Tasks given to them do not always enable them to develop their knowledge effectively, and questioning does not always stretch them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement
- Pupils talk confidently about how to keep themselves safe, particularly online. They are taught about healthy eating, healthy relationships and how to be safe in a working environment, such as on a building site.
- Pupils have a wide experience of other cultures and religions. They take part in discussions around topics such as LGBT issues and show respect and tolerance.
- The majority of pupils take pride in their work. This is evidenced in neat and tidy work in pupils' books.
- School leaders and members of staff have taught pupils about the dangers of smoking and have suggested ways in which pupils can try to stop smoking. However, there are pupils who are smoking on the school site during the day. There is a lack of clarity around the supervision of those pupils, who are out of the line of sight when they smoke. There is a clear understanding that these pupils need to be supervised closely due to their particular needs. However, there is not routine, close supervision in areas which pupils deem as smoking areas.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement
- The proportion of pupils who are frequently absent from school is above the national average and is increasing rather than decreasing. Leaders' analysis of the reasons for pupils' persistent absence has not been rigorous enough to rapidly improve the attendance of these pupils.
- Rates of absence are too high. However, due to errors in coding, school leaders and governors are unclear as to how serious this issue is.
- Most pupils conduct themselves well throughout the school day. Routines and expectations are clearly established and consistently applied. Pupils generally move sensibly around school between activities.
- Most pupils concentrate well in lessons and show interest in what they are learning. Pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour are supported well through the therapeutic approach, which staff have adopted to help pupils to learn how to regulate themselves and quickly return to class.
- When required, restrictive physical intervention is used in order to keep pupils safe. The number of occasions where this has been needed has reduced. When these strategies have been used, school leaders maintain careful records and reflect on any improvements in behaviour management strategies that could be made.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Many pupils arrive at school at times other than the beginning of Year 7. School leaders ensure that they are accurately assessed when they arrive at school. Teachers ensure that any gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed while they are at school.
- Teachers track the small steps that pupils make and celebrate these. Pupils' progress is tracked particularly well in English and mathematics. Pupils' work shows that the majority make strong progress in their learning.
- Where pupils are behind in their reading, leaders have made sure that programmes are in place to support their phonics and to develop their fluency. These are particularly successful for the very weakest of readers, who come on in their reading in leaps and bounds.
- Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress at school. This is because any additional needs are correctly identified. The special educational needs coordinator makes sure that teachers know how to meet these additional needs in order to remove these barriers to learning. In classrooms, teachers are attentive to the additional needs of individual pupils. For example, support for pupils with speech or language difficulties is effective.
- The progress that disadvantaged pupils make is strong. This is due to the personalised approach taken by members of staff in shaping the curriculum to meet the needs of individuals. Teachers know their pupils well, and leaders aim to remove any individual

barriers to learning.

- Some of the most able pupils in the school do not make the progress of which they are capable. Sometimes the work that they are given is not challenging enough, and sometimes their thinking is not extended in classrooms. School leaders are aware of this and strategies are in place to increase the rates of progress that these pupils make.
- Pupils make strong progress in subjects across the curriculum. The progress that they make and the standards that they reach in art and physical education, for example, are impressive.
- Leaders take care to match qualifications on offer in each subject with the ability of the pupils at key stage 4. The vast majority of pupils are successful at gaining the accreditations that form part of their studies. As a result, pupils leave school with a range of qualifications that supports them in their next steps.
- Although the progress that most pupils make is strong, and the standards that they reach by the time they leave school in Year 11 improving, their standards in spelling, punctuation and grammar lag behind those of their peers nationally.
- Leaders take care to develop work-related skills. Pupils access a variety of programmes to expose them to the world of work. Leaders also ensure that pupils' social and communication skills develop strongly to ease access to employment or further training.
- Pupils reach relatively high standards in vocational education programmes. They have been successful in developing skills in a variety of contexts, including horse care, customer service, caring for babies and hairstyling.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in education, employment or training by the time they leave The Meadows School. Pupils leave school with sensible and firm plans for the future. Leaders track how well pupils are doing in their placements and reflect on any additional support that can be offered to current pupils. In 2018, pupils with the highest of needs were particularly successful at securing placements.

School details

Unique reference number	131905
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10087552

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
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	28 February to 1 March 2017

Information about this school

- The Meadows is a special school for 72 pupils aged between 11 and 16. The school currently has 58 pupils.
- The school makes provision for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils are of White British origin and over two thirds are boys.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is considerably higher than the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across a wide range of lessons and learning activities at the school.
- Pupils' written work was scrutinised in lessons and in their books.
- Inspectors observed pupils' conduct while pupils were arriving at school, as well as at breaktime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils both informally and formally and to members of the staff team.
- Staff and parental feedback questionnaires were also considered. Twenty-three staff questionnaires and 14 parents' responses were considered.
- Inspectors met with the head teacher, deputy head teacher, assistant head teacher and middle leaders.
- A meeting was held with three members of the governing body
- A meeting was held with two of the school's education development partners.
- A meeting was held with the safeguarding trainer for the school
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school self-evaluation report, school development plan and analysis of the spending of additional funding received.
- Inspectors also reviewed minutes of meetings of the governors, records of the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment and information relating to pupils' attendance and achievement. Safeguarding documentation and records relating to behaviour were also examined.

Inspection team

Catherine Garton, lead inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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