

Inspection of an outstanding school: Meadowgate Academy

Meadowgate Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 2JH

Inspection dates:

5–6 February 2020

Outcome

Meadowgate Academy continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at Meadowgate. Leaders have created a haven where pupils learn well, are kept safe and flourish. Pupils learn to communicate effectively with adults. Pupils are positive about the school. They say adults listen to them and that bullying is not an issue. Pupils say that learning is fun and that they make friends.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent in classrooms and during social times, such as lunchtimes. Pupils follow well-established routines and use their specialist equipment and electronic devices throughout the school day. The school is a calm, productive and respectful learning environment. Learning proceeds easily and without disruption.

Adults meet the needs of pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) exceptionally well. Staff have excellent relationships with pupils and want them to do well. Teachers provide pupils with work that is both demanding and interesting.

Students in the sixth form relish the opportunities to gain vocational skills at Bramleys Café, in horticulture or in mechanics. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment. Some pupils develop leadership skills through participating in police cadets. They wear their uniform with pride.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

This school has many strengths. Leaders work together as a strong and effective team. They are aspirational for every pupil. All adults are dedicated to establishing better life chances for pupils. Pupils develop essential communication and language skills from the moment they join the school.

Pupils enjoy a well-constructed curriculum. Leaders give careful thought to what pupils will learn in each subject. Staff adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' individual SEND needs. Adults know what pupils need to learn to make the best academic and personal progress. Staff use pupils' targets from individual education, health and care (EHC) plans

well and effectively. Leaders make sure that the quality of teaching is consistent and well established in every class, so pupils can achieve their best irrespective of individual needs. They carefully consider different ways to motivate and help pupils to learn better.

Staff use clear instructions and well-chosen resources to help pupils access learning. Teachers choose appropriate and interesting learning activities that allow pupils to develop the knowledge and skills they need across all subjects. Pupils grow in self-confidence and behave exceptionally well.

Pupils learn to read in many different ways. This is because staff know what works well for each individual. From the outset, staff consider pupils' communication and reading needs thoughtfully, so pupils learn to read the best they can. Younger children in the early years class skilfully use symbols to build sentences to share their understanding and ask questions. Pupils of all ages have access to suitable reading books.

Teachers know the pupils well and are expert at planning activities that will help pupils show how much they know. Teachers make sure that the curriculum fits well to the needs of pupils, so pupils can make small steps of progress. In mathematics, for example, pupils who have the potential to achieve more are provided with work that makes them think.

Students in the sixth form have three years to develop their knowledge and skills so that they are better prepared for adult life. Many students enter colleges to study foundation courses. Students on the vocational pathway are very proud of the work experience provided by the school. Leaders work productively with employers to provide work placements which are meaningful. This work continues to develop.

Pupils are proud of their roles in the school council. Pupils benefit from the school's involvement with the Youth Sport Trust. Pupils have opportunities to play different sports and compete with pupils from other special schools. There is a well-equipped gym where pupils boost their physical well-being.

Leaders use any additional money they receive to enhance pupils' experience. Leaders work with other agencies to provide pupils with the best equipment available. Innovative ways are found to help pupils learn everyday skills such as cleaning their teeth. Leaders work very well with pupils' parents and families. Together, they set targets for pupils that have a long-lasting impact on everyday life.

Staff are proud to work at Meadowgate. They are well trained and there are many opportunities for career progression. Leaders consider how to reduce the workload of staff without undermining the excellent care and education that pupils receive.

The board of directors and a local advisory board hold leaders to account well for safeguarding and use of finances. They are increasingly involved in checking the quality of provision. Directors and governors do not have the same degree of understanding about the quality of education as other areas of their responsibilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding and care. Leaders and staff share a detailed understanding of pupils and the potential safeguarding and welfare issues which pupils may face.

Leaders work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that pupils receive the support they need. Staff are suitably and regularly trained. They use the school's system diligently to record any concerns they may have.

Leaders and governors check the suitability of staff to work with young people.

Pupils are taught about keeping themselves safe when using the internet and other technologies in lessons.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Meadowgate School, to be outstanding on 20–21 October 2011.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144055
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10121425
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	179
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	40
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trustees	Lynne Pritchard
Headteacher	Michelle Flanz
Website	http://www.meadowgate.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- Meadowgate Academy provides specialist education for pupils with moderate or profound learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder. Many pupils have multiple and complex needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The headteacher took up her position in September 2019. The headteacher was previously the deputy headteacher.
- The school is part of the Affinity Multi-Academy Trust. The school converted to a multi-academy trust in 2017. There is a board of directors and a local advisory board. The trust currently has one school.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the leader of the sixth form and the teacher with responsibility for the early years.

- I spoke with representatives of the trust and three members of the local governing body.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading; mathematics; and personal, social and health education (PSHE). In each subject, we spoke with curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils. We visited lessons and considered a range of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, we reviewed school policies and procedures. We spoke with the principal and designated lead for safeguarding. We reviewed the school's records for the recruitment of staff and considered the views of parents and pupils.
- There were six responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. Parents submitted free-text comments, and these were considered.
- We evaluated the 29 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff and the 30 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kay Leach

Ofsted Inspector

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