

Inspection of The Meadows School

Dudley Road East, Sandwell, Oldbury, West Midlands B69 3BU

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 July 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Care, kindness and understanding lie at the foundation of The Meadows School. Leaders, governors and staff all want the best for pupils. All are focused on making every moment count. However, this is not always the reality and further work remains to ensure that all pupils get the most from their time there.

Pupils have many profound and complex special educational needs and/or disabilities that affect how they communicate and learn within school and the wider world. Staff work hard to get to know the pupils. They understand the barriers to learning that pupils face and take action to put the right support in place.

Staff act quickly when a pupil needs help or finds things difficult. There is a positive, calm environment where pupils are cared for and valued. Pupils have varying understanding of bullying, but they agree that staff will be there for them if they need help.

Theatre groups, educational visits, work experiences, forest school and canoeing enrich the school experience for many pupils. However, there is more work to do to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to access experiences, both in and out of school, to develop their understanding of the world around them.

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

The acting headteacher, supported by a strong leadership team, has brought drive and tenacity to the school. In partnership with a strong governing body and the local authority, the acting headteacher identified certain aspects of the school provision that needed to improve quickly. Leaders' and governors' actions demonstrate a commitment to making these improvements quickly.

Communication is rightly a priority at the school. Staff work hard with speech and language therapists to implement the right provision. Picture Exchange Communication Systems, electronic communication systems, visual and body signing and aided language displays are increasingly evident in all classes. This is successfully enabling pupils to have a 'voice', both in their learning and in their lives beyond school.

Leaders are highly ambitious for what they want pupils to learn at The Meadows. They have devised a curriculum focusing on what knowledge their pupils will need to succeed. However, the plans for what pupils will learn or experience are not always clear, and series of lessons are not always well sequenced to build knowledge over time.

Staff work hard to ensure pupils are engaged and purposeful in lessons. They support pupils to complete tasks in different ways, for example by using symbols or pictures. However, in too many cases, lessons are based on completing activities

rather than learning the intended curriculum. The way that the curriculum is implemented is not always clear.

Leaders are refining the processes for recording what pupils have learned and when. In all areas, written assessment systems are linked to subjects and aim to identify the steps that pupils should achieve at different stages in their time at the school. However, the current curriculum itself is not always implemented as intended, which undermines the effectiveness and accuracy of the assessment system.

Leaders have set high expectations for reading. There is a shared commitment that all will experience a love of books. A new approach to teaching phonics has been successfully implemented. Those pupils who are ready to learn phonics do so quickly. Those at earlier stages experience handling books or responding to sensory stories.

In the sixth form, staff closely work with careers services to find opportunities for students to experience work-related learning in the real world. Their work with local businesses is particularly strong in promoting an awareness of jobs and work. However, it is not always clear whether students' voices are considered and taken into account when considering next steps after The Meadows. Students do not have enough opportunities to learn about different colleges or training providers.

Pupils have very positive attitudes towards learning. They know that staff care for them, which in turn inspires them to work hard. Inspectors witnessed very few examples of low-level disruption. Leaders carefully review when there is challenging behaviour or pupils do not attend school as much as they should and act to implement plans. Attendance is high and is improving for those who are persistently absent.

Pupils experience a broad range of opportunities to enrich their lives at school. Lessons help to inspire their knowledge of how to stay healthy or of the world around them. However, while some pupils experience trips into the local community or to outdoor adventure centres, others do not. This narrows the opportunities to experience the world around them or learn in the community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

When the acting headteacher was appointed, she identified some changes the school needed to make to safeguarding procedures. Governors and the local authority agreed with these changes. Consequently, the frequency of staff training has been increased, and systems for reporting concerns are robust, effective and used swiftly by staff when needed.

Specific lessons help pupils to make safe choices and understand risks in the community. Independent travel training and community visits help most pupils practise their knowledge of keeping safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum intent in all subjects clearly identifies the skills, knowledge and experiences they want all pupils to gain and how these build over time. It is often unclear what pupils should learn in different sequences of lessons or what experiences and opportunities will support curriculum implementation. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum intent in all subjects clearly identifies the skills, knowledge and opportunities they want pupils to gain over time and how this will happen.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum implementation in all classes is explicitly clear for pupils. This means that too often, teachers select tasks for pupils to do without enough careful thought about the knowledge and skills they want them to gain. Leaders need to ensure that all lessons and learning experiences clearly focus on the curriculum intent for what pupils need to know in that lesson and then ensure that pedagogy and resources precisely match that intent.
- Not all pupils experience opportunities to learn from and visit the local community and wider world as part of their curriculum. This restricts pupils' ability to enrich their understanding of the world around them and practise skills they have learned in school. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to learn about and visit different parts of the wider community beyond The Meadows School.
- Systems and processes to support students' understanding of options for further employment, training or employment are not yet fully implemented. This means that students will often make choices based on what others feel or what friends have done in the past rather than what they want for their future training or employment. Leaders need to ensure that pupils consistently experience first-hand encounters with different employment, training or education providers so they can make appropriate choices for what they want to do next.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	132231
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10285048
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Phillip Butcher
Acting headteacher	Theodora Papaspyrou
Website	www.themeadows.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, a new deputy headteacher took up post in September 2022. She then took on the role of acting headteacher in January 2023, while the current substantive headteacher is away from school.
- The school does not use any registered or unregistered alternative provision.
- The school currently does not meet the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following curriculum areas: reading, 'my thinking', 'my body', 'my lifestyle' and 'my communication'. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- One inspector joined a group on their educational visit to a local outdoor education centre to review systems and procedures for safeguarding and curriculum implementation when on trips.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They scrutinised the employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records. They also found out about health and safety procedures and routines.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, governors, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, transport escorts, drivers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- An inspector spoke with representatives of the local authority. A hybrid conversation was also held with members of the local governing body.

Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Heather Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Russell Hinton	Ofsted Inspector

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