

Inspection of The Meadows School

Whitworth Lane, Spennymoor DL16 7QW

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 December 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils receive a high level of support. Pupils work in small groups. Staff build positive relationships with pupils. Pupils are safe. Bullying is rare. Pupils trust staff to sort out any problems they may have.

The school is ambitious for pupils. Pupils follow national curriculum subjects. Pupils sit a range of qualifications. Pupils are proud of what they achieve. All pupils at the school have education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff know pupils well. Pupils receive effective support for their social, emotional and mental health needs. However, the identification of pupils' additional learning needs is not as precise as it needs to be.

Many pupils have struggled to manage in their previous school. Once settled at The Meadows, most pupils attend and behave well. A small number of pupils, however, do not attend school, or lessons, as consistently as they need to. Some pupils struggle to keep calm at times. Staff are quick to help pupils when this happens. There is no disruption to the learning of others.

The school encourages pupils to read widely. Pupils read regularly. The teaching of phonics to pupils at the early stage of reading is underdeveloped.

The school has recently gained new leaders, including a governing body called an interim executive board. Despite this period of change, the school has remained a stable and caring place to be.

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

All subjects have coherent, detailed plans. It is clear what pupils need to learn and in what order. Medium-term plans have what the school calls 'knowledge organisers'. These explain the key learning that pupils need to know before they move on to a new topic.

In most subjects, lesson activities match the intended learning well. Pupils steadily build on what they know and can do. For example, in science, pupils confidently link the experiments they do to key scientific concepts. In a small number of subjects, however, the delivery of the lesson activities is not as effective as it needs to be. In these lessons, some pupils struggle to stay focused on their work. This limits the progress these pupils make.

Each pupil has a personalised support plan. Staff implement the strategies on these plans diligently and consistently. However, staff have limited information on pupils' sensory or speech and language needs. The school is aware of this gap in the information it currently gathers on pupils. There are plans in place to address this issue.

The school supports pupils' wider reading well. Pupils happily read every day in tutor time. Most pupils are independent readers. For pupils who are still at the early stage of learning to read, the school has a well-resourced phonics scheme. However, phonics is not taught at present. This is because staff are waiting for appropriate training.

The school is well ordered. Most pupils attend well. However, a small number of pupils are still missing too much school. In addition, some pupils take a lot of time out of lessons during the school day. Staff respond quickly and, eventually, these pupils settle back to their learning. The school is taking appropriate steps to improve pupils' attendance at school and in lessons. There are new systems in place for managing behaviour. Staff are implementing these systems confidently and effectively. This work is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour.

There is a well-designed personal, social and health education programme. Pupils learn how to stay healthy. Pupils understand the importance of safe relationships. Pupils learn about democracy and fundamental British values in their citizenship lessons. Pupils benefit from a well-established careers programme. Pupils get specialist careers advice from the local authority. The school helps pupils get ready for the move into post-16 education or training. In recent years, all Year 11 pupils gained a place at a local college or training agency.

The school has experienced a great deal of turbulence with regards to leadership and governance over recent months. The members of the interim executive board are highly experienced and knowledgeable. They bring an appropriate balance of support and challenge to the school. Current leaders have acted decisively to improve the school. The school maintains regular contact with parents and carers. The school is considerate of staff's well-being and workload. Staff feel valued. Staff are eager to play their part in the school's improvement journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's implementation of planned learning is not consistently effective. In some lessons, pupils are not as engaged in their learning as they need to be. This is limiting the progress pupils are making through the intended learning. The school should ensure that there is consistently strong delivery of planned learning in all lessons. The school should ensure that all staff have the pedagogic strategies and resources they need to engage all pupils successfully.
- The school's systems for identifying pupils' sensory or speech, language and communication needs are underdeveloped. This is limiting the progress of some pupils in terms of their learning and their personal development. The school

should ensure it has the appropriate strategies, therapeutic approaches and resources to meet pupils' additional sensory and speech and language needs.

- The school's teaching of phonics is not embedded. This means that some pupils at the early stages of learning to read are not becoming independent readers as quickly as they need to. The school should ensure there are daily phonics lessons for pupils who need it and that all staff receive training to enable them to contribute confidently to the teaching of reading.
- A small number of pupils struggle to attend school or to stay in their lessons when they are in school. This is limiting what these pupils know and can do. The school should roll out its revised plans for, and investment in, behaviour and attendance management without delay. The school should ensure individual support plans for behaviour and attendance are kept under regular review so that any amendments that are required are put in place swiftly.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	131905
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10257066
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	61
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair of governing body	Bridget Watt
Headteacher	Andrew McGarry
Website	https://www.themeadowsschool.info
Date of previous inspection	10 June 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school's governing body was replaced by an interim executive board at the start of September 2023.
- At the time of this inspection, there was an acting headteacher. The acting headteacher has been in post since 1 April 2023.
- The school has capacity for 64 pupils.
- All pupils at the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have a diagnosis of autism or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. Some pupils have learning difficulties.
- The school uses seven unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior staff, including the special educational needs coordinator, and a range of other staff. The lead inspector met with the chair, and all other members, of the interim executive board. The lead inspector met with senior officers from the local authority. The lead inspector met with the school's leadership improvement partner and leadership improvement adviser.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading), mathematics, science and physical education. The deep dive for each subject included a meeting with curriculum leaders and a review of subject documents and plans. The deep dive also involved lesson visits, scrutiny of pupils' work and meetings with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors reviewed the curriculum plans of all other subjects. The lead inspector scrutinised pupils' work from these subjects.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school throughout the day, including at breaktimes and in lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors scrutinised school documents and the arrangements to safeguard pupils. This included meeting with the designated safeguarding lead and speaking with staff and pupils about safeguarding. The lead inspector spoke to the local authority's designated officers.
- The lead inspector made visits and telephone calls to all the unregistered alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses received through the Ofsted online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. Inspectors also considered the responses received through Ofsted's staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sarah Birch

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023