



Meadowfield School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134783
LEA Kent
Inspection number 282689
Inspection dates 7 June 2006 to 8 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mark Evans AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Swanstree Avenue
School category	Community special		Sittingbourne
Age range of pupils	4 to 19		Kent ME10 4NL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01795 477788
Number on roll	220	Fax number	01795 477771
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Hollis
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr Philip Rankin

Age group 4 to 19	Inspection dates 7 June 2006 - 8 June 2006	Inspection number 282689
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Meadowfield School opened in September 2004, as an amalgamation of two schools, St Thomas's and St Bartholomew's, and is based on the sites of those schools. St Bartholomew's was itself split across two sites, so Meadowfield is a school that occupies three sites. There are firm plans to extend and improve the old St Thomas's buildings so that all three parts of the school can come together onto a single site.

Meadowfield opened with different admission criteria to the previous two schools. New pupils have educational needs that are based on profound and multiple, severe, complex and/or autistic spectrum disorder learning difficulties. This means that the pupils currently attending the school have a wide range of educational and other needs. Almost 10% of the pupils, mainly older ones, have moderate learning difficulties and approximately one sixth of the pupils have a speech & language or communication difficulty. Two pupils were entered for GCSE Mathematics this year. Most other pupils have severe learning difficulties and/or autism. About a third of pupils are in the primary part of the school, half in the secondary and a sixth in the post-sixteen unit.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Meadowfield is a good school with a strong positive ethos: it has high expectations of its pupils in all spheres of school life, and gives prominence to the traditional values of courteous behaviour, politeness and manners. This results in pupils who achieve well, are well developed personally and socially, and who are a credit to the school and to their parents and carers. The pupils are safe, confident, and busy learning the skills and understanding that they will need in later life. Teaching is good, with many excellent lessons. All staff encourage and support the pupils in living their lives as healthily as possible. Links with the community are very strong and the pupils benefit greatly from this, gaining practical experience of how to deal with life beyond the school gates.

Pupils have a very wide range of educational needs, but because of the good work that the school does, all reach good standards, within the context of their needs. Teachers set challenging but appropriate targets for each pupil. All pupils have targets set in reading, writing and numeracy and in most instances, these targets are met as expected. There is good progress made in developing speaking and listening skills, and social skills.

The ethos of the school is evident throughout: the teachers are committed and skilled, and pupils clearly enjoy being there. One boy said that the pupils are "...more than happy..." at school: they are enthusiastic about their learning, and the staff provide high quality teaching, care, support and guidance for the pupils. The school has enthusiastically prioritised staff professional development, and this has been significant in the success of the new organisation. The curriculum of the school is still in part split as it was when there were two schools, but the leadership team and subject managers have been successful in beginning to bring about a single plan for learning. Assessment is effective overall, but practice is different across the three sites, which means that analysis of pupils' learning throughout the school is more difficult. The accommodation meets pupils' needs satisfactorily but the outdoor facilities for younger pupils are limited, and this is holding back their physical development.

Leadership is very effective: there is a clear vision for the development of the school that emanates from the principal, the leadership team and the governing body. The capacity to improve further is excellent. There is a good understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas that need to be developed further: the inspection team agreed with all the judgements made in the school's self evaluation form. However, most of the self evaluation was undertaken by senior staff and thus the process itself is not yet fully embedded in the day-to-day running of the school. Similarly, although the plans for the short- and long-term development of the school are clear and lucid, not all staff are as involved in the setting of priorities as they should be. The school provides good value for money. Management is good and significant progress has been made in creating one school from two, though there is still more to be done, for example in terms of curriculum, assessment, dress code for staff, uniform adherence by pupils and consistency of job descriptions.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The post-sixteen unit provides effective support and suitable challenge for the students who attend. The strengths of the main school are mirrored in the unit: the ethos, the quality of support and the importance of care for and between students are strong elements; a broad curriculum focused on life after school means that students are well prepared when they leave. There is more emphasis on independence skills and a more college-like atmosphere that is entirely appropriate to the greater maturity of the young people.

What the school should do to improve further

Develop further the systems for collating and analysing information on pupils' progress, so that it can be used consistently to focus resources on raising achievement. Involve all staff more fully in the systems for monitoring, evaluation and review. Extend the outdoor facilities available for younger pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils have a very wide range of attainment and capabilities, but all reach good levels across the whole curriculum, within the constraints of their learning difficulties and disabilities. All pupils have targets set in reading, writing and numeracy and in most instances, these targets are met as expected. Higher ability pupils read novels and write clearly and precisely, and in physical education the school is particularly successful in archery. Less able pupils develop literacy skills commensurate with their ability, for example gradually learning to hold a pencil or paintbrush, and tracing over letters drawn by the teacher.

Pupils throughout the school make good progress, for example in developing speaking and listening skills, and social skills. Assessment information shows that pupils also make good progress in mathematics and for many, in their handwriting skills. As pupils mature, most gradually achieve more with less support from adults, which is very good preparation for later life. This emphasis on independence is part of the educational focus of the staff in all aspects of the pupils' lives at school; parents are very pleased indeed with the progress made by their children.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' development and well-being are good. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are given good opportunities to develop spiritual awareness. There is an established set of routines which almost all pupils follow consistently. Where pupils have specific behavioural needs, staff work hard to ensure that they follow acceptable codes of behaviour. The behaviour around school and in lessons is good, and at times outstanding. Pupils have superior social skills. World

Book Week, religious education and the personal, health, social and citizenship programme give them a good understanding of different cultures.

The pupils feel safe and secure at school. They respond very well to learning about safe practices such as taking care when using electrical cleaning equipment. Pupils develop a healthy life style through the personal, social, health aspect of the curriculum and in physical education. The school is working towards the National Healthy School's Scheme Award. Pupils enjoy school, a fact recognised almost unanimously by parents and shown in very good attendance figures. Pupils develop independence skills well from a young age. The pupils make an outstanding contribution to the community, for example in work experience at a nursery and by raising money for a variety of charitable causes. The school is rightly proud of its Quality Awards for Work Experience both for pupils below 16 years and above; there are also very good links with industry through events organised by the Education Business Partnership, for example the Innovations Day is which the school works with local business. Pupils develop a good sense of economic well-being throughout school when they learn basic number and literacy skills. Role play for younger pupils and work experience and college courses for older students reinforce this work very effectively.

There is a good focus on careers education and work experience both in Years 10 and 11 and in the post-sixteen unit. This prepares the students well for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good: on many occasions, they are outstanding. Teachers know their pupils very well, which means that activities set are very well matched to individual needs. Combined with the detailed planning and strong relationships, learning is well supported by the teaching; there is also often a sense of fun in lessons that adds to the enjoyment of pupils. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution to the pupils' learning and care. Staff provide excellent role models for the pupils, although not all dress to the same high standard.

There is often a sense of fun in lessons that adds to the excellent atmosphere in the school, as seen for example in a Year 11 lesson based on creating a newspaper. Occasionally teachers do not vary the pace of the lesson sufficiently, which results in further opportunities to engage pupils being missed. Assessment of what the pupils have learned is based on a wide range of techniques and procedures: these provide useful help for teachers in planning for all abilities in a class. However, there is variation in practice between different parts of the school, which makes direct comparison of information more difficult, though a more consistent approach is gradually being adopted throughout the school. Tracking of progress made is satisfactory, though the data that is available is usually only analysed on an individual basis, which means that possible patterns in learning amongst groups of pupils may not be detected.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a good curriculum that covers all aspects of the national curriculum and meets the very wide range of needs of all pupils. Staff have worked well to merge the curricula of the two former schools, but recognise that at present, overlap could occur when pupils move sites. This is being addressed in new policy documents. Secondary pupils and students in the post-sixteen unit are given good opportunities to receive external accredited qualifications. Students are well prepared for the next stage of their life. The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is good. There is a very strong and effective emphasis on social and independence development. The present outdoor facilities limit opportunities to develop some aspects of physical play. There is a strong sensory curriculum which meets the needs of the pupils well. Pupils are given many good quality sensory and tactile experiences to develop their learning. A good range of lunch-time activities develop pupils' skills effectively. Links with other establishments, including local schools and colleges, have a very positive effect on developing pupils' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support offered to all pupils are good. Staff have worked hard and effectively to establish a safe environment which ensures that pupils feel happy and secure. Parents report overwhelmingly that their children are content at school. Academic progress is carefully monitored and when appropriate pupils contribute to their own targets. Parents are fully informed about their child's progress. Links with the Connexions Personal Advisor ensure that pupils and their parents/carers make informed choices about the future. Child protection procedures are good and are regularly updated. All pupils receive good support from school and outside agencies, for example in feeding programmes. Staff really care about the children. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good. Health and safety requirements are taken seriously and risk assessments both for individual pupils and whole group activities are undertaken regularly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good: in some respects they are excellent. The governing body work well with the principal, who has been very effective indeed in forming a new school ethos out of two old schools, with only gradual changes of personnel, pupils and accommodation. His clarity of vision for the future is excellent; ably supported by the leadership group and by the senior management team, there is excellent capacity to improve the school further. One of the key elements to the present and future success of the new school has been the provision of suitable professional development for teachers and teaching assistants. This has been planned and implemented very effectively: much of the current confidence about the future

within the school is a direct result of the carefully designed and rigorously monitored training programme. There is a danger now that the programme stalls, as many staff are keen to use their new skills, but it is likely that the new buildings will not be completed for up to two years: the school has recognised this issue, and is actively seeking ways to ensure staff are able to use new skills soon. Nevertheless, there is still scope to include school staff and others more effectively in the self evaluation and planning processes.

Equality of opportunity is promoted well so that all learners achieve as well as they can. The quality and quantity of resources are good and the school provides good value for money. Nevertheless, the exterior of one of the sites is shabby and uninviting, despite the best effort of the site manager and the staff's hard work inside the building.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Hello everyone – you might have noticed me earlier last week at your school, with my colleague Peter. Some of you were kind enough to talk to us during the day and others saw us in lessons. Thank you for making us welcome, for showing us your work and for telling us about your school.

At the end of the two days, we prepared a list of things that the school does very well, and another list of things that it could do even better. Some of the things you told us about, like the very good teaching and the kind grown-ups at the school, are on my list. Other very good things we saw were: your very good behaviour around the school, the way you all use the local community to help you learn, the way the school works with your families as well as with you, and the work that the school managers have been doing now you are one school, instead of two.

We have talked to Mr Rankin about some ways of making the school even better. The main ones are to look at the ways in which all of you learn to see if there are other ways the teachers can help groups of you learn even more, to involve lots more people in the planning for development of the school, and to improve the resources for outdoor play for the youngest pupils at Meadowfield. I'm sure you will help him and all the staff at the school, by continuing to work well in class. It will also be good if you carry on telling the staff how you think things are going, by talking to the prefects, too.

I hope that explains a little bit about what we were doing at Meadowfield. I really enjoyed my day there. Thank you again for making me feel so welcome.