



The Meadows School College of Sport

Inspection Report - Amended

Unique Reference Number 132231
Local Authority Sandwell
Inspection number 296126
Inspection dates 25–27 September 2006
Reporting inspector Charlie Henry HMI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Dudley Road East
School category	Community		Oldbury
Age range of pupils	11–19		B69 3BU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 5697080
Number on roll (school)	142	Fax number	0121 5697081
Number on roll (6th form)	53		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	A Davies
		Headteacher	G Phillips
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	25–27 September 2006	296126

Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).

Description of the school

The Meadows is a day special school. It is an extended school and has very recently been designated a specialist sports college. Most students have severe and complex learning difficulties; many of these also have additional physical, medical and communication difficulties, including autism. These students are taught within a new school building. In addition a therapeutic centre for students who have complex emotional needs is based at the school and is situated in a separate building close to the main school. The Forge Centre, a specialist college for young adults aged 19 - 25 years, is located within the main school. This aspect of provision was subject to a separate inspection that was undertaken at the same time as the school inspection.

All students have statements of special educational needs. There are almost twice as many male as female students. A third are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with about a fifth of students from homes where English is an additional language. A significant number of students are in the care of the local authority. Pupils are from across the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Meadows provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. There have been significant changes in the management and staffing of the school over the last two years. During this period there have been four headteachers, including two acting posts. The current interim headteacher took up post at the beginning of this term. In addition a significant number of other staff have been absent for lengthy periods; five teachers are currently absent. This situation has required an extensive use of supply staff over this two year period. As a consequence there has not been the level of consistency that benefits students' learning best. It is not surprising, therefore, that the quality of education has slipped from the high standards found at the last inspection. It is to the credit of the staff's commitment and hard work that despite these difficulties they have continued to provide a satisfactory standard of education to all students.

Satisfactory teaching ensures that students of all abilities are making satisfactory progress. They enjoy their lessons and, through the school council, contribute well to improving their school. However, more could be done to help them to take responsibility and become more independent, for example, in reviewing how well they are learning and what they should learn next. Other areas for improvement include better use of information collected about their needs and how well they are doing, and more effective use of support staff to make sure students are as fully involved in lessons as they could be.

The curriculum is good. In particular, the extended school developments have contributed well in providing a wide range of extra opportunities outside of the normal school day. It is too early to judge how well the ambitious plans for the very recently designated specialist sports college status will add to this. There is a strong ethos of caring for the students. This important aspect of the school's work is supported well by all staff, as well as by the wide range of additional specialists who contribute to meeting students' needs, and the good behaviour demonstrated by most students is a natural outcome.

The school has a satisfactory understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. However, the accuracy of this picture has been affected by the staffing difficulties, in that procedures to follow up the monitoring of important aspects such as the quality of teaching across the school have not been sufficiently rigorous. The new headteacher and his staff team already show good commitment and satisfactory capacity to improve on this position. A very recent audit has identified that there are significant financial management difficulties that have to be dealt with. The governing body's monitoring of this aspect has not been close enough. Before its next section 5 Inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying these weaknesses. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The 16–19 provision in the Further Education Centre (FEC) is satisfactory. The strengths and areas for improvement of this part of the school match those of the rest of the school. Students in the FEC gain a suitable range of skills to help them as they progress towards adulthood. When there is opportunity they take responsibility to help others. They have a good curriculum, including opportunities to attend local colleges part time and to undertake work experience. Staff try hard to treat students as young adults but occasionally slip into using terms and resources that are more appropriate for younger learners. Staff have also worked well with two local further education colleges concerning meeting the students' care needs. This has extended opportunities for students when they leave school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide training for support staff and make better use of them to enable each student to learn as well and as independently as they can.
- Improve the quality and use of assessment information in target setting and planning so that students learn as effectively as possible.
- Make better use of information about students' progress to identify areas of best practice and those requiring improvement in order to raise achievements.
- Review financial management and planning procedures to make sure resources are used as well as they can be on the school's priorities.
- Increase the rigour with which the governing body monitors the efficiency and effectiveness of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

As a result of their learning needs, all students enter the school with standards that are well below those expected for their age. From these starting points all students make satisfactory progress, including those who have the most complex learning difficulties and disabilities, and those who are looked after by the local authority. Students show satisfactory success in meeting the goals set for particular aspects of the curriculum and in achieving the targets within their individual education plans (IEPs). In 2005–6 all students in Key Stage 4 and in the FEC achieved external accreditation. Some more able students achieved entry level qualifications.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Students generally behave well and listen attentively in lessons and assemblies. They show good attitudes to school and clearly enjoy their lessons. Students in the therapeutic centre make good progress in developing trust, which ensures that they have confidence to try work that they find difficult. Attendance throughout the school is satisfactory, with most absences due to medical appointments or illness.

Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Their moral development is good as a result of the clear standards set by staff and the quality of their relationships with students. Many students are keen to help others and the school council provides all students with the opportunity to have a say in some of the decisions that affect them in school. For example, they have, amongst other achievements, gained furniture for the school grounds. They raise money for charities. Students' social development is satisfactory, but the way in which some lessons are organised means that not enough opportunities are provided for students to become more independent, including working in small groups.

Students are prepared well for when they leave college, including through college links and work experience placements. The personal, social and health education programme helps students to develop a satisfactory awareness of how to live and work safely. Regular, timetabled physical activities and the healthy food tuckshop run by the older students contribute well to developing healthy lifestyles, though the school could do more to discourage students from eating unhealthy snacks brought in from home.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's monitoring provides a rigorous look at the quality of teaching and learning and provides sound recommendations about how this can be improved. There is, however, too little follow-up on the effectiveness of actions taken to ensure these improvements are made. This situation has been exacerbated by the high level of staff absence and consequent use of supply teachers. Relationships between classroom staff and students are usually very positive. The school has established a common lesson structure and interesting lessons are planned that generally hold students' attention well. Teachers' assessment is not sufficiently precise to show the very small steps in students' achievements. This means that subsequent lesson objectives are not always clear enough to allow students of different abilities to progress as well as they could. Where learning support assistants are used really well they successfully

challenge students of all abilities to achieve as much independence in their learning as they can. However, the management of these support staff is too variable.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum matches students' needs well. In addition to the common core of subjects that all students follow, Years 10 and 11 have an opportunity to make choices from a set of options. This is a good development and is not commonplace in special schools. It allows students to take some responsibility for what they want to learn and, as such, is good preparation for when they leave school. The enrichment programme is a strength. Students' interest and enthusiasm are shown in the very good take-up of the wide range of activities. Examples include visits to London and the Netherlands, and theatre and music events. There is also a rich programme of visitors to the school. There is a good range of opportunities for students who show particular skills through the school's gifted and talented programme. The 'X-Club' and Youth Club are part of the Meadows' extended school services and offer a good choice of sports and other activities to students throughout the school. The school has ambitious plans to promote sport with people in the locality who have disabilities. It is too soon to say how well these plans will improve the learning opportunities for the school's own students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school has a strongly caring ethos. Teachers, learning support assistants and all other staff are highly committed to meeting the needs of the students. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Platinum Award. Parents and carers value the work of the school highly and feel confident that their children are well cared for. They are generally pleased with the information they receive about their children's education. There is also effective information and guidance as students enter the school, and again concerning options for Key Stage 4. The school works well with the Connexions service when students discuss options after leaving school. Effective links with local colleges provide an introduction to studying in a large college to ease this transition. Target setting and the involvement of students in planning and reviewing their learning are not yet good enough to challenge all students to achieve as well as they can. Additional medical and learning needs are well met by the close working of school staff with nurses and specialist therapists, as well as with visiting teachers for students who have visual or hearing impairments. Procedures for child protection are robust and meet recently established requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. There has been a clear direction set for the development of the school, in its role as an extended school and, very recently, its designation as a specialist sports college. This enables the new headteacher and staff to build on these core aspects of the school's provision.

Self-evaluation is satisfactory. Many areas identified as strengths are supported by inspection findings, but insufficient rigour in monitoring key aspects of the school's work has led to an overestimation of some aspects of quality, such as students' personal development. The school has set in place systems for the collection and analysis of information about students' achievements, but the use of such information is at too early a stage to show its effect on improving progress.

Equal opportunity is satisfactorily met, however, not all students have up-to-date statements of special educational needs and some have not had the necessary annual review of their needs.

While accommodation is good within the main school it is inadequate in the therapeutic centre. These students do not have adequate access to specialist facilities appropriate to their age and abilities. Throughout the school the use of specialist communication resources is inefficient, as the available equipment is not always used where it is needed. This was also identified as an area for improvement at the last inspection.

The governing body shows substantial commitment to supporting the development of the school. This has been particularly important during the lengthy period of staffing difficulties. However it has failed to exercise adequate monitoring of the school's financial planning and management, which are inadequate. A very recent audit highlights concerns about the application of financial control procedures. It has only very recently come to light that the projected expenditure for the current year is significantly greater than the expected income.

The performance of the school has dipped since the last inspection. The most significant aspect of this has been the substantial level of staff absence. This situation has been monitored rigorously by appropriate agencies and has been found not to have affected the students. The new headteacher, supported by senior staff, already shows satisfactory capacity for improving the quality of the school's work.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know we recently visited your school to find out how well you are doing. Thank you for looking after us and making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed it and learned a lot about your school. Thank you for telling us about the things you do and what you like about school.

What we liked most about your school

- The way you all work hard and enjoy school.
- The care that all staff take of you.
- The range of things that you learn.
- The way your teachers work with your parents and carers.

What we think the school could improve to make it better

- The way your teachers look at how well you are doing in your work, and use this information to help you do even better.
- The way staff help you to become more independent.
- The way the adults in charge of the school, including the governors, look at how the school's money is spent so they make sure that it is used for the most important things to help you.

You can help in your own way by doing as much as you can for yourselves.