

Meadows School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124512
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314945
Inspection date	21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	76
6th form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Cucyck
Headteacher	Christian Williams
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	High Street Knutton Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 6BX
Telephone number	01782 297920
Fax number	01782 296150

Age group	7-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Meadows is currently designated as an all age school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. It is however, undergoing a rapid change of character as it moves towards becoming a special school for only secondary age pupils. This process has already resulted in a significant reduction in pupil and staff numbers and a shift in the school's population towards a greater complexity of need, including ASD (autistic spectrum disorder). The nature of pupils' learning difficulties means that pupils' attainment is well below average. The great majority are of White British heritage.

The school has been housed temporarily in an old, redundant infant school, well away from its previous setting, since the original buildings were destroyed by fire in the autumn of 2004. It moves into new, purpose built, co-located accommodation on the Leek High School Campus in January 2009 and is expected to complete its change in designation by September 2009.

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 is a satisfactory school where exceptional pastoral care enables pupils to make good progress in their personal and social development. Arrangements to help pupils to develop a healthy lifestyle and ensure their safety and security are exemplary. They clearly enjoy being at school very much and have a positive attitude to learning. There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere across the school and a strong culture of mutual respect. Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence and have realistic ambitions for their future lives. They certainly make the best of the opportunities offered to them to influence the way the school runs. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative and supportive of the school and its staff. Many wrote very praising notes on their returned questionnaires, perhaps best summarised in the comment, 'The school does a fantastic job in every way.'

Staff have made the very best use of the current, less than ideal accommodation and provide engaging activities, which include imaginative use of community facilities, to support and motivate pupils, especially for those post-16. The satisfactory curriculum is balanced and increasingly relevant to pupils' needs as the school develops provision and expertise to meet their changing needs. This is particularly so for those with ASD, behavioural difficulties and emotional vulnerability, but work is not as advanced for those with more severe learning difficulties. Staff redundancies have resulted in the loss of some activities, such as outdoor education, but there are plans to rebuild this capacity over time.

A particular strength in the satisfactory teaching lies in the very effective teamwork between teachers and their able teaching assistants, ensuring that support and encouragement for individual pupils are well directed. Although much good work has been undertaken recently to gather and analyse information about pupils' performance, this is not yet used consistently by teachers across the school to plan pupils' work; nor is target setting used to best effect to involve pupils in their own learning. Pupils make steady progress and achieve satisfactory results, although their work is not properly valued through accreditation at the end of Key Stage 4.

There have been solid improvements since the last inspection, most especially in provision for and the applied use of information and communication technology (ICT). The headteacher, working in a very productive partnership with his experienced assistant headteacher, has managed the challenging situation he inherited on appointment to good effect. He has led his colleagues well, so that the necessary changes have been handled firmly but sensitively and the whole staff team are now approaching the next phase of the school's history positively and productively. The school has an accurate and realistic view of its strengths and necessary areas for improvement, and plans well to effect them. Governors provide sound support and challenge. The school has satisfactory capacity to adapt to its changing circumstances and is well-placed to move forward in its new setting.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision for post-16 pupils is satisfactory overall, following improvements to accommodation and the curriculum since the last inspection. Achievement is satisfactory. Satisfactory teaching ensures that pupils make steady progress in their studies. The good curriculum makes effective use of a wide range of links with a college, training providers and other settings to provide

relevant and challenging opportunities. Pupils are respected and valued as young adults. There is a strong emphasis on encouraging them to be as independent and assertive as possible, with plenty of opportunities provided for them to practise these skills in the wider community. They consequently achieve solid results in a range of accredited courses by the time they leave. They develop a strong awareness of their rights and responsibilities and of personal health and safety through the excellent pastoral guidance. As a result, pupils' capabilities to function successfully in life beyond school are nurtured well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment data on pupils' performance are used consistently across the school to inform planning for pupils' learning.
- Make proper arrangements to accredit pupils' learning through external agencies at the end of Key Stage 4.
- Complete development work to adapt the curriculum to meet the full range of needs in the school's changing population.
- Ensure that pupils are actively involved in the target setting process.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils enter the school with well below average standards in most areas of learning due to the nature of their learning difficulties. Their progress in social development and self-confidence is good and this, together with satisfactory teaching, enables them to make solid progress in their learning. Achievement is satisfactory with some particular strengths, including in art and design and physical education. All pupils, including those with particular learning difficulties such as ASD, make similar progress because teaching is properly adapted to meet their individual needs and appropriately targeted to stretch each individual. The school is certainly aware of individual circumstances that have been or could be barriers to learning and provides a secure and enabling environment where all pupils can achieve both socially and academically. Pupils make adequate progress in developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT and apply them effectively in their learning of other subjects. There is currently limited accreditation of learning at the end of Key Stage 4, but older pupils' work is properly valued in this way by the time they leave school post-16.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The very strong support and respect pupils receive from staff ensure that they feel secure. It is at the heart of their sense of well-being, makes school a fun place to be and encourages good attendance. Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and out in the community. They listen carefully and relate well to staff and each other, helping less able friends sensitively when necessary. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of fairness and right and wrong, develop spiritual and cultural sensitivities well through discussion and other activities, and value individual

differences within school and in the wider world. Those who have been given the opportunity to represent their peers in the school council take their responsibilities seriously and effect appropriate change. All pupils know what to do to stay healthy and safe and express confidence that any concerns they might have will be dealt with speedily and effectively by staff. They develop workplace and other valuable life skills well through good quality vocational and work experience placements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching is satisfactory and staff teams work successfully together. Pupils learn effectively across the school because teachers organise lessons carefully to enable all pupils to succeed and make adequate progress. The high quality of relationships between teachers and pupils gives pupils confidence in their learning. There is a strong focus on ensuring that pupils have the basic capabilities to enable them to make the best of the learning opportunities offered. Teaching assistants have a high profile and play an important role in areas of reading support and facilitating effective communication. They also provide good quality, focused support in the nurture and TEACCH (treatment and education of autistic and related communication handicapped children) groups. Whilst assessment arrangements have been much improved, and there is ongoing development of approaches to take account of the much smaller steps in progress made by newer pupils, there is not yet a consistent approach to using this knowledge to inform the planning of next steps in pupils' learning. This identified improvement need is being tackled effectively as part of the comprehensive package of continuing professional development for all staff.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has started to modify and adapt its curriculum, with local authority help, better to meet the needs of its changing population, but there is some way to go before the changes are complete, particularly regarding provision for pupils with severe learning difficulties. Satisfactory arrangements have been made to ensure that the mixed age class that accommodates the remaining primary pupils receives its full curriculum entitlement. The secondary curriculum is broad and relevant, incorporating a strong emphasis on personal, social, citizenship and health education, including drugs and alcohol awareness. As a result, it promotes pupils' personal development well. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to study structured award units, but achievements in these are not yet properly accredited. The school has recently regained its Exam Centre status and this situation should be corrected for the next year. The situation is much better in post-16, where pupils benefit from the support of outside providers. The school makes good use of community facilities to extend curriculum opportunities for sports, cultural and humanities studies. It has done well to establish its presence in the local community in the short time it has been there. It is not, however, able to provide extra-curricular opportunities, such as out of school clubs and residential education because of transport and staffing constraints.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils and their families benefit considerably from the outstanding provision made for supporting their social, emotional and health needs. The recent award of Healthy School status recognised this strength. Robust safeguarding procedures are in place and pupils' welfare is central to the school's philosophy. The school works in very effective partnership with a range of agencies and is already planning its engagement with new partners on the high school campus. Pupils value the sensitive, objective pastoral guidance that they receive from all staff and there are good programmes for career planning and learning about the world of work. Academic guidance is less effective. Long and shorter-term targets are set and reviewed regularly, but pupils are not properly involved in their formulation or review, with the result that they are not always understood or relevant to their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher's strong leadership has been recognised and valued by the whole school community, including parents, as having 'made a difference' to the school's overall effectiveness. He has been straightforward in addressing weaknesses, encouraged staff to be reflective about the way they do their jobs and created a common purpose to achieve challenging targets. As a result, achievement has been raised. The school is now on a much firmer footing to move forward to its next chapter. The successful partnership he enjoys with his able assistant headteacher has been pivotal in effecting these changes and creating a positive, 'can do' culture. They have encouraged and supported innovation and have a clear picture of how the school might function in its new setting. Self-evaluation is satisfactory. Plans to distribute management responsibilities more widely across the school are being developed, but have not yet been implemented. This has meant that much of the monitoring and accurate evaluation that has informed good improvement planning has been done by the senior management team. They are very aware of what still needs to be done and have set appropriately challenging, but realistic targets to achieve these ends. Budget planning and management has been well organised and day-to-day running of the school is efficient and effective. Governors are supportive and make satisfactory use of the information they are given to ask the right questions. They are not, however, as active as they could be in monitoring the school's activities through a structured programme of visits. They are consequently not as effective as they could be in providing the right level of informed challenge, nor properly equipped for collaborative working with other governing bodies on the new campus.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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?	3	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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

22 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meadows School, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 6BX

Thank you for making us feel so welcome in your school. We were sad that we could only be with you for one day. We enjoyed attending your lessons and talking to you. My colleague was particularly grateful to the members of the school council for the sensible and honest dialogue he had with them.

Meadows is a satisfactory school and we think your headteacher and all the staff have worked extremely hard to make it a happy and safe place where you can get on with your learning. We found that the main strengths of your school are the following.

- You really enjoy being at school because everyone helps you to do the best you can.
- You behave well and work hard in your lessons.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know how well you are doing and plan work that will help you to learn even more about the things you need to know to grow up into successful adults.
- The school is very good at working with your parents and carers in helping you to attend school and make as much progress as you can.

Your headteacher is very clear about the things that need to be done to make the school even better. These are the most important things to do.

- For teachers to make better use of the information they have about what you can do when planning your lessons.
- Make proper arrangements for pupils in Year 11 to get certificates to show how well they have done.
- Complete the planning for what new pupils in the school will learn.
- Find better ways to involve you in setting your own targets.

I hope you will always make a positive contribution to your school by continuing to behave and work as well as you do. I wish you many happy days in your new school when you move next year.

Yours sincerely

Steven Parker Lead inspector



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