

Meadowgate School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110949
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325259
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Kathryn Burdis HMI

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	118
Sixth form	16
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Brewer
Headteacher	Ms Carolyn Dobson
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Meadowgate Lane Wisbech Cambridgeshire PE13 2JH
Telephone number	01945461836
Fax number	01945589967

Age group	2–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with statements of special educational needs. An increasing number have sensory and profound learning difficulties or are assessed as having autism. This means that they enter school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are very low for their age. Almost all pupils are White British. There are many more boys than girls. The Early Years Foundation Stage provides for children from two years of age. Most pupils leave the school at 16 to attend local colleges but the school provides post-16 education in the leavers' group for those with needs that are more complex. The Butterfly Team, a multi-agency learning disability service, is situated on the premises. CamPlay, a summer term programme runs on the school site for three weeks each summer and is subject to separate inspection arrangements. Since the last inspection, the school has achieved many external awards. These include, the Inclusion Quality Mark and relatively recently, specialist school status for physical and sensory needs. The headteacher died tragically in January 2009. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up post in September 2009. The deputy head is currently acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school where everyone is totally committed to making the best use of every minute of the day by providing exciting, motivating and challenging activities. All staff bring high levels of energy and commitment in providing activities that help pupils of all ages and abilities to achieve their very best. Parents and carers are very positive about sending their children to the school because of the very high standard of care and range of opportunities provided. Parents report, 'the school is exceptional, the staff are highly skilled, very hard working and dedicated to all the children in their care'. Inspectors agree.

Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points because teaching is of such high quality across the school. Outstanding teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage ensures the youngest children make exceptionally good progress, especially in the areas of communication and personal development. The school is so successful because of the commitment all staff have to 'getting it right' for each and every pupil and, as a result, pupils' personal development is outstanding. Careful consideration is given to how best to meet individual needs and over time an excellent and varied curriculum has evolved that engages pupils throughout the school day. Teachers plan an excellent range of experiences both in school and in the wider community. Very detailed assessment informs personalised learning plans and pupils really enjoy what they are doing. Carefully planned work engages pupils and helps them to meet their targets. Teachers are very skilful in adapting an activity if they assess it is not contributing to learning. Information about how well pupils are doing is analysed very carefully and the information is used well to identify the progress of different groups.

Teaching approaches for pupils with autism and sensory needs are developing very well and teaching for these groups is often excellent. The standard of care is exceptional with every effort taken to develop ways of ensuring pupils with communication difficulties can express their views and opinions. However, not all support staff and escorts are confident in using different communication approaches to ensure consistent reinforcement across the school day.

The provision for personal development and well-being is excellent. Pupils are consistently encouraged to think about how to keep safe and what they have to do to have a healthy lifestyle. There are many good sporting opportunities to extend physical activity. Examples of pupils contributing to their school and wider community are numerous and meaningful, including community-based work to improve the local environment and many fund raising activities. Enterprise activities and a wide range of externally accredited vocational courses prepare them well for life after school.

The school accommodation is used to capacity; however the limitations of space and absence of a covered area for Early Years Foundation Stage children place limits on further developments. The staff and pupils are actively involved in ensuring plans for a proposed new school building identify all their requirements.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The senior leadership team continually reviews the provision and introduces new strategies to reflect the changing needs of the pupils. The school has well-established and successful approaches for monitoring and evaluating how well it is doing and continually seeks for the next improvement. The good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the achievement of specialist status and the Inclusion Mark, demonstrate the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The leavers' group is very well led and managed and the staff team is highly effective in planning interesting and appropriate activities to engage students. All students receive a very high standard of care and their personal development is outstanding. The individual planning and careful consideration of how best to meet individual needs enable students to engage in an ever-increasing range of accredited courses and have their many achievements recognised. The accommodation is not ideal but the school strives to create a college atmosphere. Students respond very positively to the expectation that they will take responsibility for their behaviour and choices about the courses they take. With guidance, they set their own targets and choose from a very good range of vocational and enterprise options. All students access college provision. Students develop confidence and apply their citizenship skills in making a very positive contribution to the life of the school, for example, in arranging school events. Key skills are taught very well and students' achievement is often outstanding. The Young Enterprise scheme is a major strength, providing opportunities for students to develop independence in learning and money management. Extending the range of workplace providers has been identified as an area for further improvement as not all students have access to work experience places. Parents are very pleased with the education provided and students are actively involved in developing the provision.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children's achievement in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Their progress in communication is particularly impressive and forms a platform for their achievement in all areas of learning. Outstanding leadership and management ensure that children's safety and well-being are given top priority. Staff ensure all children are helped to discover the means of communication that suits them best, for example, by using signs or choosing between symbols. Personalised learning opportunities are matched extremely well to children's needs. Their learning difficulties, and in some cases lack of mobility, mean that it is rarely possible for children to decide independently how to spend their time. Nevertheless, staff give them lots of stimulating opportunities to make choices. Children delighted in choosing and experiencing a range of objects and sensory props and made extraordinary efforts as they retold the story of the Bear Hunt. Children learn outside on a daily basis, enjoying the stimulating and recently expanded outdoor area. These opportunities are limited in bad weather as there is no covered outside play area. Children's personal development is often exceptional. They benefit from learning and playing with slightly older children. Close and very productive links with children's families have been established. Parents' knowledge of their children and their interests are fully used when teachers and support staff plan activities and begin to set targets for each child's learning and development. Parents report very high levels of satisfaction in the quality of care and this is reflected in their confidence in agreeing for their child to attend an annual residential trip.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all staff have confidence in approaches for communicating with students with autism and sensory needs

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

After an excellent start in the early years, pupils make outstanding progress as they move through the school. This is the case no matter what their age, special need or background and is a reflection of the exceptionally good teaching and relevant and exciting learning experiences. Pupils achieve the challenging and broad ranging targets set for them in both their educational and personal development. All individual education plan targets are realistic yet demanding, to ensure each pupil reaches their potential. Meticulous tracking of individual pupils accurately measures progress and informs future targets. Pupils' progress in learning how to communicate is a strength because staff are skilled at establishing the methods best suited to each pupil and adapting these as pupils' skills develop. Pupils' progress is very good in aspects of personal and social education such as interacting and working with others, because they have such excellent opportunities to develop and practise these skills. Individual behaviour and care plans devised by a range of professionals are implemented well, supporting sensory and physical achievements. Successful strategies to manage the behaviour of pupils with autism enable them to benefit from lessons and many make outstanding progress. Older pupils have good opportunities to gain qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 and Post-16 before moving on to college placements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding because every activity is planned to take into account the individual health, social and educational needs of pupils. Pupils' enjoyment of school is exceptional and, given the medical needs of some, attendance is good. Through the highly enjoyable range of activities, pupils learn how to relate to each other and build very positive relationships with adults. Those with the most complex needs sustain their focus and involvement in activities for long periods of time and others talk with great enthusiasm about their enjoyable lessons, clubs and residential trips. Behaviour is almost always extremely good. Pupils enjoy many opportunities to take part in exercise in and out of school and learn about healthy lifestyles. However, unhealthy options are sometimes used as treats, limiting the otherwise good provision for promoting healthy lifestyles. Pupils learn about personal safety and first aid and know how to respond in difficult situations. Pupils say they feel safe in school and have great confidence in the adults working with them. Pupils of all ability are given the skills to make choices using alternative communication methods as appropriate. Good access to an independent advocate helps pupils to resolve their worries and to clarify their views so they can make a purposeful contribution to their annual review.

From helping to tidy the classroom or being a good friend, pupils move on to making more structured and positive contributions to their school and the wider community. The school council representatives demonstrate mature and thoughtful approaches in carrying out their responsibilities. All pupils know the behaviour policy and were keen to point out that the limited amount of bullying is swiftly dealt with. They are confident that they could approach any member of staff who would help if they had any problems. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding and they show care and compassion for each other.

Pupils gain a good understanding of their own and local community and develop a good understanding and awareness of difference. The more able pupils not only talk with great

insight into why it is important to help others but demonstrate considerable thought and care towards their classmates.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

There is a fun element in all lessons, which builds up pupils' love of learning. All teachers plan exceptionally well for pupils' individual needs and plans for lessons are extremely clear, showing exactly what each pupil is intended to learn. Teaching assistants make very strong contributions to learning and are always fully aware of their role in lessons. Staff teamwork, including the support for pupils' personal care needs, is excellent and ensures that time for learning is used to the full. Teachers, support staff and therapists know the pupils very well, enabling them to plan interesting well-paced lessons that challenge at all levels. The staff are constantly looking for ways to improve lessons and there is a seamless collaboration between the teaching and non-teaching staff, which consolidates learning and achievement. Thoughtful and regular recording of progress evaluates the match of work to pupils' individual targets. The introduction of alternative methods of communication enables all pupils to have access and involvement in their assessment. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning is accurately highlighting strengths and areas of development for all staff.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy an outstanding curriculum and further enrichment activities, which are very effectively adapted to meet individual needs. For example, the sensory curriculum provides excellent opportunities for pupils that are more vulnerable. The curriculum is broad, balanced, and rigorously monitored against the Every Child Matters outcomes. Personal, social, health, and citizenship education are strong elements of the curriculum and have a significant impact on pupils' achievement. The time allocated to science, highlighted as a weakness in the last inspection, has been doubled, allowing a depth of study leading to success in external accreditation.

There is a wide range of activities outside of the classroom, which provide additional excellent community experiences and preparation on how to react safely in a range of situations. Sport, music and art have a pivotal place in the curriculum; their discipline and challenge not only raise pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem, but also their performance techniques. Information and communication technology (ICT) is strongly used throughout the school. The improvement in the range of computerised equipment, such as switches, has enhanced learning for those who find communication difficult.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's care, guidance and support are outstanding. Teaching staff demonstrate excellent commitment and support staff are intrinsically involved in all aspects of guidance and support. Academic guidance is accurate and helping all pupils to improve. Precise tracking is in place and is being refined further with a new programme to clarify target setting and provide the ability to compare the school's performance with other special schools nationally. Risk assessment is secure. An effective child protection policy is understood by staff and its implementation

monitored well by a senior manager. The 'single central record' of staff checks is accurate and comprehensive. Annual reviews and individual education plans involve pupils and parents very well in their review and target setting. Good guidance is available to pupils including an independent advocate and Connexions. Very good partnerships with health and social care agencies ensure the well-being of pupils who have a range of medical needs and those who are looked after.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Over time, the outstanding leadership and management of the senior management team have ensured that the school adapts and changes to meet an increasing range of needs. Leaders and managers at all levels have a very clear understanding of the school's purpose and continually look for ways they can improve provision further. Equality of opportunity is promoted throughout all aspects of the school's work. The school's self-evaluation systems highly accurately reflect its strengths. Well established approaches which evaluate how well the school is doing inform further improvements. Parents' and pupils' views are regularly sought and taken into account in planning developments. There are creative solutions to any challenges caused by the current accommodation. Plans for a new school building as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme are designed to address current limitations. Partnership work of high quality with local schools not only adds value to the experiences of Meadowgate pupils but also benefits those from neighbouring mainstream schools. Governors bring valuable expertise and provide excellent support and challenge to the school.

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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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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 learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Meadowgate School, Wisbech, PE13 2JH

Thank you all very much for making us feel so welcome in your school. We can see why your parents are glad you attend Meadowgate School. You told us that you really enjoyed school and you thought it was brilliant. We agree with you.

You go to an outstanding school that does some things really well. These are some of the things that impressed us.

- You are a real credit to your school and families as your behaviour is extremely good, and you are kind and thoughtful to each other.
- Your school is run very well and all the staff work very hard to make sure it keeps on getting better.
- Your teachers provide really interesting and exciting activities that encourage you to learn and you make really good progress in everything you do.
- You develop confidence and independence so that you can make a real contribution to your school and local community.

We suggest that to make your school even better everyone needs to develop their skills in using signing, symbols and pictures so you can all communicate with each other.

I would also like to say a particular thank you to the school council members whom I talked to. I was very impressed with how well you were able to describe the strengths of your school and the contribution you make to ensuring it is a happy place for everyone.

I hope you continue to enjoy your time at Meadowgate and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Kathryn Burdis

Her Majesty's Inspector