

The Meadows School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131905
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	341247
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Alastair Younger

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lynn Laird
Headteacher	Mr G Harris
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. He visited seven lessons involving six different teachers, and held meetings with governors, staff, and a group of students. He observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan, examples of students' work, recent minutes of the governing body, school policies relating to safeguarding and information relating to attendance and exclusions. Over 40% of inspection time was spent observing students, looking at their work and speaking to them. Questionnaires returned from 16 parents and carers, 16 students and seven staff were analysed.

The inspector reviewed many aspects of the school's work. He looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by students and their attainment
- the management of change by the acting headteacher and senior staff
- the attendance and behaviour of students
- the quality of teaching and learning.

Information about the school

This is a school for students exhibiting social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs reflecting the severity of their difficulty. Many of these statements also identify additional learning difficulties. Nearly all students are White British; there is a very small minority of Travellers. Boys outnumber girls by about 5:1. Higher than average numbers are looked after children. A quarter are supervised by the Youth Offending Service and more than half have active Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) involvement. Mobility is very high, with a turnover of almost 50% of the school population. Almost a half of the current students have been on roll for less than a year. The school is currently led by an acting headteacher, formerly the substantive deputy headteacher, following the secondment of the substantive headteacher, at very short notice, two months ago.

The Meadows is designated as a specialist school for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Among many other awards the school has gained the Stephen Lawrence Award and the Basic Skills Chartermark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school does many things well, and some outstandingly so. Students are well taught and make good progress. Attainment improves rapidly but remains low, mainly because of students' very low starting points. Students' behaviour is satisfactory. This is a creditable achievement given the extreme behaviours that have often led to students' admission in the first place. The single most significant reason why good provision and good leadership and management do not lead to even better outcomes is the very high turnover of students, which peaked at nearly 50% last year. During their time in school students make significant gains in their learning.

Extensive and accurate self-evaluation and an outstanding programme of continuing professional development for all staff contribute strongly to the school's good capacity for further improvement. This is strengthened by falling turnover of students, a measure of the school's success. The school has improved since the previous inspection and has the strong support of parents and carers, students and staff alike. Staff are proud to be associated with the school.

Students feel safe because they recognise and appreciate the skills of staff in supervising and protecting them. They know that there is always someone they can turn to in times of difficulty. As students said, 'Staff always listen'. Parents and carers also appreciate that their children are kept safe. Care, guidance and support are good but the frequent use of exclusion as a sanction results in many students not being able to benefit from this level of care for short periods.

Students' progress is meticulously recorded and analysed and teachers demonstrate excellent skills in checking that what is being taught is being learned. Assessments, and the evidence of inspection, show that writing is an area of weakness. Students speak and listen with growing confidence and reading is promoted well but many opportunities are missed to promote better writing skills.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' writing skills by:
 - ensuring that teachers of all subjects make opportunities for
 - students to write
 - lessening the reliance on worksheets where students record their work with as little writing as possible
 - celebrating more openly success in writing through displays of work and daily

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rewards.

- Reduce the use of exclusion by:
 - extending the use of seclusion, with supervision, in the school so that learning can continue and students can maintain access to the good care, support and guidance that the school provides.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Attainment on entry is often very low and does not reflect students' potential. This is because most of them have had a hugely disrupted education as a result of their difficulties. Students learn well and make good progress because they are well taught and well supported. No group of students, other than those whose attendance is spasmodic, make different progress from any other. Girls and boys make similar progress as do looked after children. The very small minority of Travellers who left last year gained few qualifications but are currently in full-time employment, representing a significant achievement. There is a difference in the progress students make in different subjects. This is clearly shown in Year 9 where many fewer students meet expectations in English compared with their performance in mathematics and science. This is largely because they do not make enough progress in improving their writing skills. This weakness extends into Key Stage 4 with the result that while about one quarter of students gain GCSE passes in mathematics and science, none do so in English. Although the majority of students gain some success in GCSE examinations, it is rarely at the higher levels. Nevertheless, nearly all of last year's leavers gained qualifications that will be of use to them in the future by following courses that are particularly well matched to their needs. Those who did not were frequently persistent absentees.

Errant behaviour is often the main reason for students' admission. Students try very hard to conform. Most make every effort to impress and convey thanks to staff for helping them. This demonstrates the development of a good moral conscience. Individual moments of crisis are frequent but expert management by staff ensures that students feel safe and the learning of others is rarely interfered with. Misbehaviour is much more frequent out of classrooms than in them. The level of exclusion for unacceptable behaviour last year was very high. Students say that exclusion as a sanction does not work.

Low attendance is attributable to a number of circumstances. It is significant that the proportion of absence recorded by Travellers did not appear to affect their employment prospects. Although absence is high, nearly all students improve their pattern of attendance after admission to the school and this is why, in conjunction with the good academic progress they make and the development of better social skills, their prospects for future economic well-being are satisfactory.

Most students say they enjoy school. Even when they do not, they express a good understanding of the fact that other people are trying to help them. In relation to their difficulties, students develop a good social responsibility and are tremendously loyal to the school. They are attentive in lessons which tell them about the ways people from

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other cultures live and they show interest, rather than alarm, in the different ways that cultures express themselves. The respectful way in which a group of Year 9 students extended their understanding of Islamic culture, without a whiff of prejudice, testifies to their growing understanding of cultural differences.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There is a growing core of good and occasionally outstanding teaching. Where teaching is less than good it is usually because it fails to capture the imagination of students and maintain it, with the result that students lose interest and enthusiasm. Outstanding teaching involves students in tasks that relate to real-life situations, such as estimating the cost of groceries, checking their estimates and then devising a healthy menu within their budget. Where teaching is weaker, opportunities to encourage students to write for different purposes are frequently missed and not enough is done to encourage students to take pride in their work. Teachers manage behaviour well. Skilled classroom assistants support students' behaviour and learning well. The use of assessment to support learning is outstanding. Extensive training undertaken by staff has paid

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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dividends. Teachers constantly check what students are learning and remembering. Many lessons start with a short session to establish what has been remembered from previous lessons and what students already know. This allows for the fine-tuning of what is subsequently taught. Students are frequently involved in contributing to the assessment of their own and others' work. Nearly all lessons end with a check of what students have learned and what they have found difficult.

Teachers frequently miss opportunities to help students develop better writing skills. A science lesson, for instance, made insufficient demands on students to learn how to record the results of an experiment they had hugely enjoyed and an English lesson was weakened because although students had engaged fully in dialogue, when it came to recording their thoughts, most students wrote as little as possible, and even then, only with close support.

The curriculum is well planned to ensure that students are presented with a good range of learning activities and opportunities for personal development. There is a very good balance between academic, key skills and vocational accreditation. Routes to accreditation are carefully chosen to match the characteristics of students and their most pressing needs. Those who show a particular bent for practical, creative or work-based activities are given good support to help them achieve recognition for their efforts. There is a wealth of relevant and enjoyable enrichment opportunities. For example, students studying the Muslim faith as a part of the topic-based 'Opening Minds' Curriculum visited the Oriental Museum. On three evenings each week the school day is extended into the evening to allow students to experience an additional range of physical, practical and aesthetic activities. About one third of students frequently engage in these activities but more could be done to encourage more widespread participation.

Students, and parents and carers appreciate the high quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school. Low attendance does not reflect the tireless work done by staff to try to engage students. This involves clearly targeted work, involving a parent support adviser and teacher tutors, with the parents and carers of vulnerable students and professionals from services such as Education Welfare and CAMHS. This work is frequently effective in improving the attendance of students. Students receive good-quality advice on their options on leaving school and are well prepared for transfer to other provision, such as further education, or occasionally to paid employment

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The school has coped exceptionally well with enforced changes in leadership and management. This demonstrates well the good systems that are in place and shows that responsibility for leadership and management has not rested disproportionately on the shoulders of an individual. The morale of staff is high.

The governing body plays an important part in the continuing development of the school. It is hugely supportive and contributes well to ensuring that statutory duties are discharged. These include specific responsibilities for ensuring the safe recruitment of staff and the safeguarding of children. A strength of safeguarding procedures is the lead role the school plays in working with parents and carers and the huge range of other professionals and agencies that are a feature of students' lives. Equal opportunities are well promoted and monitored. No individuals slip the net and careful analysis of progress ensures that new strategies are always pursued when a student appears not to be thriving.

The school contributes well to community cohesion. The community of the school has a strong sense of identity. Year 11 students reported, 'It's good to be at the Meadows because we are one big family,' adding as an afterthought, 'sometimes'. The school offers good-quality support and training to other schools and to families and organisations involved with students through its specialist status. The school plays a prominent role in a professional association which represents the 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties' community. Among other things, the 'Opening Minds' strand of the curriculum promotes an understanding of the beliefs and values of other cultures. Enterprise activities have enabled students to support individual students in a Kenyan special school and students participate in annual visits to other European communities. These have helped broaden students' cultural horizons.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2
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Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very happy with the school's work. They feel that their children are well taught and make good progress and that the school is well led and managed. They are very happy with the way in which staff keep in contact with them and report their children's progress. They feel strongly that the school is preparing their children well for the future. The inspector agrees with their views

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Meadows School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 16 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 44 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	50	5	31	2	13	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	7	44	8	50	1	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	12	75	4	25	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	44	7	44	1	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	9	56	7	44	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	63	5	31	1	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	50	8	50	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	7	44	9	56	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	56	6	38	1	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	9	56	7	44	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	63	5	31	1	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	9	56	7	44	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	56	6	38	1	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



05 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Meadows School, Spennymoor, DL16 7QW

I visited your school the other day to see how you were getting on. Thank you for making me welcome. Special thanks to those of you who met with me to tell me about your experience of school. You were very positive, very polite and very sensible. You made some good points that helped me with the inspection.

Your school is good. You make good progress because you are well taught and your school is well led and managed. You are well cared for and the school is safe. The timetable is good and you clearly enjoy most parts of it.

To make the school even better I have recommended that:

- it should find ways to keep more of you in school for more of the time and to find alternatives to excluding you for misbehaviour
- it should help you to improve your writing skills.

All the best and good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Mr Alastair Younger

Lead Inspector

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