

Inspection of Meadows School

London Road, Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 0RJ

Inspection dates:	12 and 13 November 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel valued at Meadows School. They know that their social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs will be understood and supported. Leaders and staff work closely with therapists to create the school's kind, safe and respectful culture. Several parents and carers praised how well the school helps pupils to learn to understand themselves and communicate their feelings clearly and calmly as they get older.

The school's approach to personal development is exceptional. The friendly atmosphere and caring staff give pupils confidence that they can learn and achieve here. A wide range of excellent enrichment opportunities, trips and visits help pupils to develop their character and learn how to behave in social situations. These range from playing board games at lunchtime to kayaking and camping as part of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award expedition.

The academic curriculum has improved since the last inspection. In particular, a new approach to teaching reading is helping pupils of all ages access the curriculum more readily. Adults adapt each pupil's curriculum well to meet their specific SEMH needs. Provision in the sixth form is especially strong.

The school's raised expectations for pupils' achievement, alongside excellent careers education, advice and guidance, help pupils to be very well prepared for future life.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The Barnardo's charity's values form the backbone of leadership in the school. Leaders respect the unique worth of every person and encourage everyone to fulfil their potential. Those involved in governance have supported and challenged the school to improve. Staff enjoy working at the school because of its strong, inclusive culture that focuses on each individual's well-being, safety and development.

Developing pupils' character and helping prepare pupils for their future lives are integral to the work of the school. Staff are expert at helping pupils understand how to look after their mental health. Focused teaching helps pupils learn to eat healthily, stay safe and respect and be kind to each other. Pupils of all ages benefit from the school's excellent approach to careers information, advice and guidance. Adults are adept at finding out about each pupil to provide them with opportunities to develop their unique talents and interests. This becomes more bespoke as pupils get older. As a result, by the time pupils are in the sixth form, they are able to choose activities and qualifications that allow them to thrive in the community and sustain destinations at college, university or work.

The school is typically calm and friendly. When pupils join, many find it hard to focus their attention. Adults patiently help pupils to manage their behaviour and increase their focus on learning over time. Pupils are positive about the school. Several said that the best thing about the school is that staff help them to be the best versions of themselves.

The school has improved how it monitors behaviour and attendance. This is helping leaders to spot and act on patterns and trends. For example, additional training for staff in how to help pupils when they are anxious or dysregulated has reduced the number of incidents and means the school is much calmer than previously. Focused teaching to help pupils treat each other with respect has significantly reduced instances of poor behaviour.

Many pupils who join the school have previously had long periods of absence. Adults learn quickly about each pupil's barriers to coming to school. Staff's personalised, nurturing approach helps build trust. Most pupils increase their time in school so that they soon attend very regularly. This shows that pupils feel increasingly safe in school.

The school has raised its ambitions for pupils' achievement. Subject leaders are knowledgeable. New, well-organised curriculums set out the knowledge pupils need to gain over time. Adults are typically skilful in identifying gaps in pupils' learning and tailoring what they teach to pupils' changing needs. As pupils get older, they choose subjects and achieve qualifications that are very well matched to their needs and aptitudes. Provision in the sixth form is exceptionally strong.

Rightly, improving teaching and learning in English has been the school's main priority for staff training. As a result, there is now a consistent approach across the whole school to teaching pupils to read using systematic, synthetic phonics. All staff are trained in how to teach phonics so that no matter what age a pupil joins the school, their gaps in phonics are quickly identified and start to close. A well-organised approach to teaching writing is also raising standards. There has not been the same focus on checking that teaching and learning in other subjects is as strong. The school recognises the need to monitor the quality of teaching and learning in some other subjects where new curriculums are in place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the curriculum has been recently redesigned. The school has not yet ironed out some inconsistent approaches to teaching and learning in these subjects. This means that, at times, some pupils are not learning as well as they should. The school should ensure that all academic subjects are consistently well designed and delivered to a high standard.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	119029
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10341531
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	17
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Wood
Principal	Ed Reilly
Website	www.meadowsschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	20 and 21 April 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Meadows School is owned by the children's charity, Barnardo's.
- The school caters for pupils who have SEMH needs. Many have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities, such as autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and speech, language and communication needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils of secondary school age and in the sixth form attend the main school site. Pupils in the primary phase attend a separate site, located at Sandhurst Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 3ND.
- The school currently uses two registered alternative providers and two unregistered alternative providers.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the principal, other senior leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector met with governors to discuss their role in holding the school to account, and held a meeting with the regional director of Barnado's to discuss how the responsible body carries out its statutory duties.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, science and art. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and support staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To explore the impact of the school over time on pupils' education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and well-being, inspectors met with leaders and staff, including therapists, to discuss the school's provision. Inspectors also considered a range of policies and additional documentation.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who submitted letters to Ofsted and who completed Ofsted's confidential survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff who completed the confidential survey, and gathered their views when meeting with staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Inspectors met with pupils to consider their views on the education they receive.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with the providers of alternative provision used by the school, and with a representative from the local authority.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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