

Inspection of Meadows School

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

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 April 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils say that since arriving at Meadows School their lives have improved a lot. Parents and carers are supportive of this. One parent said, 'My child is a lot more settled at this school.'

Pupils feel happy and safe. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils know that staff care about them and are interested in their well-being. Pupils behave well around the school. They are confident that staff will help them, for example if there are any occasional incidents of bullying. In lessons, pupils enjoy completing the tasks they are asked to do. Although leaders work hard to make sure that pupils attend well, there are still too many who do not attend regularly enough.

The school's wide curriculum enriches pupils' lives. Many pupils say how much they enjoy activities such as fishing, visiting farms and outdoor education. The beautiful and extensive grounds provide a calm space for pupils to de-stress in.

Staff often have high expectations for pupils' academic work. However, this is not always the case. Leaders do not ensure that there is a strong reading curriculum. Expectations about how quickly pupils will learn to read are too low.

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

When pupils first arrive at Meadows School, they have often had previous negative experiences of education. Staff are sensitive to pupils' needs. Over the months they are at the school, pupils gradually improve their self-confidence. They start to look forward to their futures with optimism.

Much of the school's curriculum is well planned. The important knowledge that pupils need to learn is identified and presented in a logical way. For example, in personal, social and health education (PSHE), pupils learn about food labels, and how to use them to ensure they are eating healthily. In most subjects, assessment is used well to ensure that staff identify any gaps in pupils' learning.

Pupils often arrive at the school needing to develop their reading skills. However, leaders do not ensure that pupils quickly learn the skills to read fluently. Many different phonics schemes are used. Leaders have not made sure that staff across the school are well trained to develop phonics skills sequentially. This means that pupils do not follow a clear step-by-step path when learning the basics of reading. Often, pupils are given books that include sounds they do not know. This can be disheartening for them.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, gain a range of accreditations and qualifications. Leaders ensure that students complete the right qualifications so that they will achieve success. Some students take their A-level courses at local grammar schools and go on to further study at university. Provision for careers education and work experience is strong. Pupils are helped to explore a range of possible careers

options and enjoy a comprehensive work experience package. They have the chance to visit numerous apprenticeship providers and colleges. All pupils from Years 8 to 13 have independent careers advice.

Leaders are mindful of the needs of staff. They have ensured that staff have been supported to take on different roles during some lengthy staff absences. Some of these absences have been caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sometimes recruitment has been an issue. Staff consider that workload is appropriate and are supportive of the direction leaders have set for the school.

However, leaders have not ensured that staff have received enough training in whole-school systems, such as the recording of behaviour and well-being. As a result, staff are not yet using these systems well enough. This means that incidents relating to pupils' social and emotional needs are not always correctly logged or analysed. Although leaders monitor attendance well, there are still too many pupils who do not attend school regularly enough. Governors support the school well. They are aware of the areas that need further attention. Governors fulfil their statutory duties well, including with regard to safeguarding.

The school provides many opportunities for pupils' personal development. Leaders ensure that pupils gain a greater awareness of their own physical and mental health needs. Staff in the therapeutic team provide useful therapies. Across the school, staff make sure that pupils know how to ask for help and advice. There is a structured programme to prepare pupils for their future lives. For example, they learn how to set up bank accounts, and budget. Pupils learn how to cook nutritious meals. Leaders and staff provide a wide range of opportunities beyond the school. These support pupils' cultural understanding and broaden their horizons and views of the world.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school is very aware of the potential dangers and threats that pupils could encounter. These include online risks. Staff talk to pupils about how to stay safe when using social media.

Those responsible for leading safeguarding are quick to act when it is appropriate. They have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations. Staff have good partnerships with families and carers. This enables staff to provide help, or signpost families to the support that is needed. There are strong links with a range of external agencies.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Currently, many different phonics schemes are used across the school. Leaders have not ensured that staff, both in the primary and secondary departments, are well trained to deliver phonics effectively. As a result, pupils do not learn to read well enough. Leaders must ensure that they implement an effective, sequential phonics programme and that reading books are matched to the sounds that pupils know. They must ensure that staff receive the training they need to deliver the school's reading programme effectively.
- Some monitoring systems are not used well enough by staff. This means that incidents related to pupils' social, emotional and mental health are not always being accurately recorded. Leaders need to provide more training for staff so that all incidents are correctly logged and analysed.
- Too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough. This means that they miss out on important learning, academically and socially. Although leaders are working to improve attendance, they need to redouble their efforts to reduce pupils' absence.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	119029
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10237637
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	70
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Priscilla Hother
Principal	Ed Reilly
Website	www.meadowsschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 October 2016, under section 8 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 social, emotional and mental health needs. Many have additional special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Since the last inspection, the primary school provision has relocated to Tunbridge Wells.
- The school uses two alternative providers. These are North Kent College and Skills for Employment.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, food technology and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders. They also had discussions with leaders from the primary, secondary and sixth-form provisions and staff responsible for careers. In addition, inspectors met with members of the therapeutic team.
- Inspectors met with four members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors evaluated the 12 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including four parents' free-text comments. Inspectors also considered an email from a parent. They took account of the 42 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding lead, spoke with pupils and staff, checked school records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school and spoke with governors.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

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