

Meadowfield School

Swanstree Avenue, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 4NL

Inspection dates	13–14 November 2014
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Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- From the Nursery to the sixth form, pupils develop a joy of learning at Meadowfield School.
- The inspirational Principal has high expectations of everyone. She is very well supported by strong leaders and managers including the governing body.
- As a result of outstanding leadership and management, many areas have improved since the previous inspection including the sixth form, teaching and achievement.
- As they move through the school, pupils grow in maturity and confidence. By the time they leave, they are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, teachers use detailed assessments to provide activities that are expertly matched to each child's needs.
- The sixth form offers a broad range of relevant subjects. Almost all students now gain external qualifications before moving on to college or alternative adult provision.
- Across the school, pupils have a wide range of different needs. Despite this, most pupils make outstanding progress over time from their starting points in all areas of learning and personal development.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes because they feel safe and trust adults. As one pupil said, 'we are like a close family here'. The whole community is happy and supportive.
- Teachers know the pupils so well that they plan daily individual small steps. Together with teaching assistants, they create a calm and hard working environment.
- Almost all pupils behave exceptionally well. Adults are exemplary role models. They are consistently calm and reassuring. This is especially effective for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorders.
- Teachers give pupils very effective feedback during lessons and in marking. However, they do not all consistently give pupils opportunities to improve their work.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 20 lessons in a range of subjects and year groups, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, sixth form and some individual sessions.
- Nine lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors took account of the 71 responses to the online parents' survey, Parent View, and of the school's own records of parents' feedback.
- They held meetings with various members of staff and representatives from the governing body. Inspectors spoke to pupils and observed behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The inspectors also looked at documentation about pupils' progress, teaching and planning. The school's documents on safeguarding were scrutinised, together with records of attendance and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading and looked at their work.

Inspection team

Helen Howard, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Michael Buist

Additional Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Meadowfield is a community special school for pupils aged four to 19, who have profound, severe and complex needs. These include profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- There are more boys than girls. Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who are known to be eligible for pupil premium (additional funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in care) is above average.
- The school has Nursery provision on site, which offers observation and assessment for up to 18 children who are dual registered with mainstream nurseries. These children attend two or three sessions a week.
- Children attend full time in the Reception class.
- Forty four students aged 16 to 19 attend the sixth form. Some attend courses part time at Canterbury College and MidKent College.
- The school manages and provides an outreach specialist teaching and learning service for the local authority to 60 schools in the Swale area. This includes supporting teachers in other schools. A comprehensive training programme is also offered to teachers, covering many aspects related to special education.
- Meadowfield has gained the Leading Parent Partnership Award.
- The school is working towards becoming part of a Co-operative Trust with six other special schools in the area.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils consistently have the opportunity to improve their work when teachers give them feedback in lessons or in books.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The Principal, supported by a very strong leadership team and governors, makes sure that all pupils do the very best they can. As a result, pupils make excellent progress from their starting points over time. This includes their academic progress and personal development.
- Leaders and managers know the school well, including its strengths and areas to develop. They use assessment very effectively to plan how to make further improvements. Teaching, achievement and the provision made in the sixth form have all improved since the previous inspection.
- A few pupils work at National Curriculum levels. The school is currently in partnership with other special schools to develop a whole-school system for tracking progress as these levels are being removed.
- Leaders and managers promote equal opportunities very well. They use data effectively to make sure that groups of pupils make the same progress as others and that no pupil falls behind. They use additional funding in a range of interesting ways to support disadvantaged pupils. For example, some attend a local group that provides activities to join in and be part of a team. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils do at least as well as others and many do better.
- Pupils report that there is no discrimination in school. This is because leaders and managers do everything they can to ensure that pupils fully understand how hurtful this can be.
- Additional primary sports funding has made a big difference. Pupils now have specialist teaching and coaching and many participate in new sports. They also enjoy entering competitions with other schools.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps at every stage of school. In particular, children in the Nursery learn the skills they need to be ready for Reception. Sixth-form students visit local colleges and receive very good advice about their future, including through work experience and college placements.
- Seventy one parents responded to the online parent survey 'Parent View'. This, together with the school's own records of parents' comments, shows that almost all parents are positive about how well the school is led and managed. The school's very good engagement with parents has resulted in it gaining the Leading Parent Partnership Award.
- Subject leaders have an important role in making sure that all pupils make exceptional progress. They regularly check teaching and pupils' work in their books. Sixth-form leaders also carefully check how well students do at college and on work experience.
- The subjects that are taught across the school give pupils a wide range of opportunities to acquire knowledge and develop personal and social skills. They encourage pupils to develop independence and make choices. The new approach for four classes for pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties is already resulting in even faster progress. In one lesson, for example, one pupil was able to indicate that her foot massage should end.
- The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including through trips to the theatre, visits to the local community and in the subjects taught.
- Some pupils who are part of the school council have a say in how the school is run and others give talks to governors about what they are doing. Pupils are very well prepared for modern Britain because they develop strong values of respect and tolerance.
- Leaders, including governors, take safeguarding very seriously. The arrangements they make to keep pupils safe are extremely effective.
- The school's highly regarded outreach service provides specialist teaching and learning advice to other schools, including for the Early Years Foundation Stage. It also offers a full programme of special education training for all staff in schools.
- The local authority has great confidence in the school and provides only light-touch support.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The very effective governing body knows the school exceptionally well, especially how well pupils are doing. Governors check that information they receive is accurate by visiting the school regularly, talking to pupils and questioning leaders and managers. They check that the additional funding is used well and makes a difference. They know the quality of teaching and make sure that the management of teachers' performance is thorough. They tackle underperformance quickly and reward teachers appropriately. All statutory duties are met, including about safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Their very positive attitudes in lessons have a big impact on how well they are doing. They arrive in school ready and keen to get on. The school prospectus for the sixth form urges students to arrive with 'a diary, stationery and a smile' and they all do.
- Pupils encourage each other to behave well and they are highly supportive of each other. The very good relationships they build with adults create an environment of total trust and mutual respect for each other.
- Leaders make sure that pupils' behaviour when they are out of school is of an equally high standard, including when they are at college, work placement or on trips.
- A few pupils have behavioural difficulties that are linked to their special educational needs. These difficulties are managed by adults in a calm and sensitive way so that, over time, pupils' behaviour improves considerably.
- Pupils are acutely aware of what bullying is and the different forms it can take. They are clear that it does not happen in school but that they would know what to do if it did.
- Attendance is higher than nationally for special schools. Most pupils attend regularly, although for a small number of pupils their medical conditions affect overall attendance.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils are very well supervised at all times and as they get older they become aware of how to keep themselves safe, including on the internet.
- The school makes detailed risk assessments of every activity and regularly reviews its practice. Pupils say they feel very safe in school and parents agree.
- Leaders and managers make sure that anyone who works with pupils has the appropriate security checks.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- In lessons observed during this inspection, all teachers were highly enthusiastic and this motivated pupils. Teachers know the pupils very well and their regular assessments help them to plan the next small steps of learning in reading, writing and mathematics.
- This very effective planning for each pupil means that over time all groups of pupils make excellent progress, including disadvantaged pupils. Teachers meet regularly to discuss progress and identify pupils who may be starting to fall behind. They plan activities to help them catch up quickly.
- All teachers support communication very well, using a range of signs and symbols that encourage pupils to respond. For example, during 'snack time' in the Reception class, one pupil was encouraged to use his own symbol cards to ask for a biscuit. Another was taught to vocalise the sound of 'b' for 'banana'.
- Pupils enjoy learning to read and they practise regularly in school. Teachers use an approach that develops pupils' ability to link letters and combinations of letters with the sounds they make (phonics). This is helping pupils to apply the skills they have learned to reading texts.
- Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can do. For example, a Year 11 class of pupils with severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders was studying positive and negative numbers. Pupils could apply their knowledge to using a thermometer.
- The high expectations seen in lessons matches records about pupils' progress and work in their books. Many wonderful displays show how well pupils achieve over time, including in writing, mathematics and art.
- Teachers are especially effective in responding to what pupils do or say in a lesson. For example in a Year 9 science lesson, one pupil with severe learning difficulties suddenly exclaimed, 'look, bigger!' She had noticed that she could make the shadow of her hand smaller or bigger. The teacher suggested trying different objects to see if this was always the case and she learned that the size of shadow depended on distance from the light.
- Teaching assistants provide invaluable support. Together with teachers, they make organised and efficient teams. They maintain high levels of excellence in teaching, care and support throughout the day.
- Teachers give good feedback in lessons and in marking about how well pupils are doing. They also show what pupils need to do to improve their work, where this is appropriate. Some teachers give pupils specific opportunities to make these improvements although this is not the case in all lessons.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- All groups of pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points. By the time they leave school almost all pupils attain an external qualification. They are exceptionally well placed to start their next stage of education or work when they leave school.
- Over the last three years, school records show that pupils' rates of progress have consistently improved and are being maintained at a high level. Rates of progress for pupils who are currently in the school show that this is continuing.
- Pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder make fast progress because teachers provide them with visual prompts and clear routines. Over time, many pupils develop the social skills they need to be able to relate well to others, take turns and join in.
- Pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties make excellent progress because teachers plan the small steps that are necessary for them to respond and begin to make choices.
- Some pupils have severe learning difficulties and they make outstanding progress because teachers have high expectations of what they can achieve. For example, a Year 10 class were evaluating Shakespeare's play Macbeth following their own recent performance at the Woodville Halls Theatre in Gravesend, Kent. They were able to write or talk about how an audience might have responded to the performance.
- There are no differences in progress between groups of pupils, including those who are eligible for literacy and numeracy catch-up funding in Year 7. Leaders conduct a very thorough check of how well all pupils are doing and this is making sure that none falls behind over time.
- More able pupils in the school have the opportunity to reach higher levels. For the first time, some now gain GCSE qualifications in mathematics or art.
- Pupils make similar outstanding progress when on college courses. The work they do there contributes to the accreditation for their final qualifications.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- Children make outstanding progress from their starting points. They make significant gains in physical development, social skills and well-being, and are well prepared for Year 1.
- The activities that adults offer give children many opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These include learning to be part of a group, getting on with others, taking turns, and being kind to each other.
- All groups of children, including boys, girls and disadvantaged children, behave very well and make outstanding progress. This is because staff plan exciting activities that are based on children's needs and interests. For example, Reception children made clay models of garden creatures after adults noticed one child's interest in garden worms.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage environment is very welcoming and bright. Excellent indoor and outdoor resources and imaginative activities are designed to capture children's imagination. These include the classroom 'den' with mobiles and torches to use in the dark. These help to create moments of wonder for children.
- Staff work well together as a close-knit team to assess and plan future activities. They get to know the children well and help them to settle quickly. They are especially skilled in engaging children in activities and keeping them on track. Their high level of supervision means that children are safe.
- Staff use their expertise to observe and make assessments of children in the Nursery who are dual registered with other nurseries in the local area. Adults make detailed observations over time using a range of evidence and make informed decisions about future placements.
- 'Learning journals' record photographic evidence of how well each child is doing. Parents are fully engaged with the assessments and add their own observations regularly.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is very well led and managed. Outreach support from the staff makes sure that the best practice is shared with other schools. It also helps children to make rapid progress.

The sixth form provision

is outstanding

- The school has made many improvements since the previous inspection and the quality of education now provided in the sixth form is outstanding.
- Over the last three years, students have been offered many more opportunities to gain external qualifications, including unit awards, certificates and diplomas. A broad range of vocational and academic subjects is available including functional skills in literacy, information and communication technologies and mathematics. They also include awards in employability, and independent living.
- All students attain at least one qualification before they leave school. Many attain two or more. They are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage because they receive excellent information and guidance.
- All groups of students are very well behaved and make similar exceptional progress from their starting points, including those who are disadvantaged, boys and girls, because each student has a tailored programme to suit their needs and interests.
- Students who are able undertake work-experience placements in a range of venues and this helps them to prepare for future employment.
- Students are offered many opportunities to develop independence and respect for others. For example, a sex education lesson included a discussion about others' differences in a sensitive and mature way. Consequently, students demonstrated their knowledge and showed a great deal of tolerance for other people.
- Students are able to join the school's sixth form council, which makes important decisions about the school, and contribute to planning how funding is spent. Recently their fund raising helped them to build a new food technology area, with two kitchen workstations.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Students are motivated and totally absorbed in learning. Teachers plan exceptionally well to meet individual needs and establish good relationships, built on mutual respect.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed. Leaders and managers make sure that all students make fast progress, have challenging work and do the best they can.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	134783
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	448035

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Hollis
Headteacher	Jill Palmer
Date of previous school inspection	5–6 October 2011
Telephone number	01795 477788
Fax number	01795 477771
Email address	office@meadowfield.kent.sch.uk

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