

The Meadows School

Springfield Road, Leek, ST13 6EU

Inspection dates 28–29 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students are very well prepared for their futures because of their good progress and the excellent ways they are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe and how to be part of a team. They behave well in and around the school.
- The senior leadership team and the governing body are highly ambitious for the school and its students and hold the staff to account well for the progress of the students they teach.
- Good use of the pupil premium and of other resources means there are no differences in the progress of any group of students and reading and mathematics have improved considerably as a result.
- Teaching and achievement are good and improving because leaders check on both rigorously and are quick to take action if either of them appears to be slipping.
- The sixth form is good because students receive good teaching and benefit from close working with local communities, the high school and colleges. Students have highly individual programmes that help them to achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is not enough outstanding teaching. Occasionally the work is too easy for students and they do not make as much progress in a lesson as they could.
- The range of courses and qualifications students can take has been extended to include more practical subjects and GCSE but these are not yet fully in place, including in the sixth form.
- Some students are unclear as to what their targets are and what they can do to achieve these, though they are always eager to improve their work.
- Students make less progress in writing because they do not have as many chances to develop these skills.
- Not all subject leaders check students' progress carefully enough.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons, all of which were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, the inspection team made short visits to other lessons, looked at pupils' work and listened to students reading.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils and members of the governing body including the Chair and Vice Chair and the headteacher of the high school. A telephone conversation was also held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 10 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, the school's parent and pupil survey records and 18 questionnaires completed by staff. They talked with groups of students as well as individual parents.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's own self-evaluation, the information it holds on pupils' achievement and progress, the school's safeguarding policies, and records and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors scrutinised student work and records, including those of sixth form students.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mark Emly

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Meadows School shares a building and grounds with a mainstream upper school, Leek High School. The Meadows is a generic secondary special school and sixth form for students with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. Students attend from all over Staffordshire and sometimes from East Cheshire. Most students are brought to school by local authority transport.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs. The largest group has moderate learning difficulties. Other significant groups include students with autistic spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Many students have had poor attendance and challenging behaviours before they attend the Meadows. Some have been excluded from their previous schools. Others have long-term medical and physical needs.
- Very few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds and none speaks English as an additional language. A much higher than usual proportion is supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority). The school has also received additional funding for Year 7 catch-up this year.
- The sixth form has grown considerably since the previous inspection and the top floor of the school's premises has been converted into accommodation for these students.
- The school's sixth form students attend Buxton College and Leek College, supported and taught by sixth form staff as part of their programme.
- The headteacher has been in post since January 2013 and the leadership team has been restructured since that time.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more of it is outstanding by making sure that teachers:
 - plan work that is at the right level of difficulty for all groups, especially the more able
 - use marking and verbal feedback more consistently to help students themselves be more aware of how they are doing and how they can achieve even more
 - give students clear, understandable targets to improve their work so they know what they can do to achieve them
 - give students more opportunities to write at length in different subjects.
- Raise achievement so that more students make outstanding progress from their starting points in all subjects by:
 - extending the range of accredited courses students can take at the school or through partners, including those available at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form
 - making sure that all subject leaders follow the lead of the English and mathematics subject leaders in checking students' progress carefully.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress from their very varied starting points. The school is rigorous in tracking students' progress and checking on how well they are doing.
- A whole-school emphasis on reading and new groupings in mathematics has accelerated progress in these subjects particularly. More-able students in Years 10 and 11 are proud to be taking GCSE in mathematics and are on course to achieve or exceed their targets in this. The school has plans to offer further GCSE subjects for these students next year.
- Students' progress in English is good and particularly for reading and for speaking and listening and communicating. Whatever their level of need, students are helped to communicate more accurately and to listen to and share their ideas with others. Excellent use of the pupil premium and the school's own resources has brought this about, for example through the training of specialist teaching assistants.
- Not everyone makes such good progress in writing as in reading, however, because teachers do not plan as many opportunities for students to write at length in different subjects and some are not so confident in writing as a result.
- Students make good progress in other subjects including more practical subjects such as food technology and art. Students in a food technology lesson, for example, showed good mixing and cutting skills and were clear how to improve their scones. Their progress in personal, social and health education is outstanding and contributes very well to their learning in other subjects and the ways in which their behaviour improves.
- The school works well with the high school so that students with particular talents can take courses and qualifications within the mainstream school. Students are proud to do so but are very clear that they feel they owe this to being 'turned around' in their learning by The Meadows.
- Students who have the most complex learning needs, whether profound and multiple learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders, make good progress. Some make exceptional progress in their communication skills and the ways in which they join in and socialise with others. This is because staff are expert in the use of the right communication system for them and are highly focused on helping students to join in whole-school activities and other class lessons.
- While targets set for individual students are precise and ambitious, these are not always shared clearly with students so that they understand what they are trying to achieve and how close they are to reaching them.
- Those students supported by the pupil premium achieve well and there is no attainment gap between them and others with similar starting points, nor for any other group of students.
- Sixth form students achieve well. The school is particularly successful in providing these students with the social and mobility skills that they need for their next placement. As a result, all students last year were in training, education or employment. All sixth form students have well-targeted individual programmes of study that build on their interests. These also develop their core skills in English and mathematics further, as well as equipping them with important life skills

and practical skills such as in horticulture and food technology.

- The sixth form is rightly extending its range of courses as students who have benefited from the increased opportunities and better progress in the school join it. Students achieve well in a range of practical and life-skills awards, as well as in their taster courses at college.

The quality of teaching is good

- Almost all teachers have an excellent understanding of students' needs and, in particular, those that arise from learning difficulties. This means that they are expert in managing students' behaviour and in developing their communication skills. Students and parents recognise this.
- Teachers plan interesting lessons for students and most take good account of what is known about students' prior learning in subjects so that this is built on well. Occasionally this does not happen and everyone has the same worksheet or task to do. Although there may be some additional work set for more-able pupils, they still do the easier work, even when they have already shown that they know the answers.
- Teachers are very good at encouraging students to have a go at new experiences but also use routines very well to help students with the most complex needs to feel safe to learn. Students trust their teachers and are keen to please them. In a music lesson, for example, they showed great joy and concentration as they joined in familiar songs, beating rhythms and using different instruments. The shared enjoyment of staff and students was palpable.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge which helps them to adapt their lessons to the differing needs, interests and challenges of students within their classes. They make good use of practical resources to help bring lessons to life and are particularly good at telling students how well they are doing in keeping involved and listening and thinking for themselves. They are less consistent in the ways in which they help students to understand their targets or in how they mark students' work so that students know how to improve it or why something is good.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to students' learning and have received effective training from the school to help them to fulfil their roles. Specialist teaching assistants are used very well to help improve students' behaviour, communication skills and to liaise with families.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good because staff know students very well and are skilled at drawing out contributions and ideas from them. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and involvement and are very focused on helping them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to have choices in the next stage of their education or in their working life. Teaching draws on community resources well to help students apply and develop their skills and confidence, including travelling by themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good, including in the sixth form. Most students make excellent gains in the ways in which they manage their own behaviour.
- Students are keen to answer questions in lessons and to share their work. Those with the most complex needs, such as profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders, join in lessons increasingly well, taking more notice of each other as well as listening to their teachers. These groups for the first time last year were able to enjoy a residential

experience.

- Students say that they are achieving things they never thought possible, because they have been helped to manage their behaviour and are now equipped to learn. Students have access to good careers support and advice that helps them to be clear about what they might do next and what they need to do to achieve this.
- Poor behaviour is rare in lessons and students noticeably become more social and improve their behaviour, even when this is linked to their disability or need, because staff give clear messages as to what is acceptable and what is not. Staff's high expectations are noticeable and students rise to them. Students who spoke to the inspectors said that they know staff want the best for them and that they will help them if they are feeling angry or distressed.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Bullying is rare. Indeed, students and their parents say it never happens and that students are accepting of each others' differences, because of the culture of care and concern and celebration of each child that pervades the school. One student said, 'Here I can just be me and that gives me confidence that it's okay to be me. Everyone likes me and that helps me to learn.'
- Students themselves have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe, given their levels of need, and of the different forms that bullying can take. This is because of the excellent emphasis the school puts on these through life skills programmes and the personal, social and health education programmes. Sixth form and Key Stage 4 students, for example, have an excellent understanding of the dangers of social media sites. They show tolerance of different religions. They say name calling is rare and that staff make sure they understand about sexual relationships and love.
- Behaviour is good rather than outstanding because a few students still struggle to behave well, particularly when the work challenges them or is not what they want to do.
- Sixth form students are proud of their new accommodation and indeed all students respect their school, tidying up carefully after lessons. The sixth form students value their privileges, such as not wearing uniform and feel they must set a 'good example' for other younger students. They take their 'buddy role' seriously. Although they mostly join in lessons with enthusiasm and try their best, this is not always the case when they find the work is more challenging.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and his senior leadership team provide highly effective leadership that is improving the school all the time. In particular, they are now rigorous in gathering and analysing information about the achievements of students and in checking that everyone is making as much progress as they can.
- Support carried out as a result of this analysis is already paying off, such as the improved progress in reading and mathematics brought about by targeted work and precise grouping.
- Leaders check rigorously that no group is disadvantaged in learning and that everyone has equal access to the experiences they should.
- However, leadership and management are not yet outstanding because some of this work is not yet complete and not all subject leaders analyse the progress information for their subjects in the same depth as the English and mathematics leaders.

- Senior leaders, however, have a very accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. There is a clear schedule and plan to make sure that subject leaders use the information they gather to improve progress and standards further.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The range of courses has been extended and students have highly individual and relevant programmes that promote their well-being and achievement effectively. They are very well prepared for their futures. Leaders work well with colleges and employers to make sure that students move smoothly into college or employment.
- Leaders have managed teachers' performance well, linking this carefully to whole-school targets and to students' progress, so that standards and teaching are good and improving.
- Excellent use has been made of partnerships with the high school to make sure that individual students have access to courses that challenge them to achieve even more and the access to specialist facilities enhances all students' programmes.
- The curriculum is highly relevant and increasingly extends students to achieve even more. Highly effective work experience and work-related programmes mean students develop and apply core skills effectively in the school and sixth form. An excellent range of visits and residential opportunities help students both to apply their skills and to feel more at ease in the broader community.
- The school is ever vigilant in keeping students safe, both through its safeguarding and child protection work and its work with parents and students. Parents value this level of rigour. Parents are extremely pleased with their children's progress, some saying that their children are achieving things they never thought possible and that they 'now have a future'.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors are extremely knowledgeable and provide effective challenge and support to the school. They fulfil all of their statutory responsibilities, checking carefully on how different groups are doing and visiting regularly to see for themselves.
 - Governors ask detailed questions regarding the quality of teaching, including that for different groups and about the impact of different interventions, such as those for students supported by the pupil premium. They are clear as to what now needs to be done to improve the school and determined that it will get even better. They have a good grasp of how the management of teachers' performance is related to student performance and what can be done to reward good teaching, although they have only recently been involved in overseeing this more actively.

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	124512
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	431141

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	37
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clive Lilley
Headteacher	Christopher Best
Date of previous school inspection	22 June 2011
Telephone number	01538 225050
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