

Meadowcroft School

24 Bar Lane, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1 4AD

Inspection dates

21 to 23 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that all independent school standards are met.
- Procedures for managing the designated smoking area on the school site are weak. At the time of the inspection, the associated risk assessment documentation did not reflect the seriousness of pupils bringing flammable materials onto the school site.
- 'Free choice' activities form a proportion of the school day. However, some of the activities do not have clear learning intentions, particularly in the primary phase.
- Pupils are allowed to smoke on the school site. Leaders were unable to provide evidence that they were actively offering ongoing support for pupils in smoking cessation.
- Although all aspects of pupils' personal development are taught, there is not a cohesive scheme that sequences pupils' knowledge and skills progressively, particularly between primary and secondary phases.
- Planned activities, in the primary phase, are not routinely considerate of the targets and advice given by other professionals to support pupils' learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The quality of teaching is good overall, with some that is exemplary. For the most part, teachers plan activities that build on what pupils already know and can do successfully.
- Staff are skilled in de-escalation techniques. They manage pupils' behaviour well. As a result, the proportion of behaviour incidents are reducing year-on-year.
- Increasing proportions of pupils are acquiring a suite of appropriate accreditations by the time they leave the school. This is an improvement from the last inspection.
- Careers advice and guidance is effective in raising pupils' aspirations. Such is its success that, in 2018, all pupils leaving the school went on to training, employment or apprenticeships.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management further by ensuring that:
 - risk assessments relating to pupils' smoking on-site are well considered and reflect the seriousness of pupils bringing flammable materials onto the site, the health risks of smoking and the wider implications for pupils who do not smoke, including primary-aged pupils
 - leaders' plans for improvement are sharply focused and contain measurable success criteria so that they can be evaluated accurately
 - findings from monitoring activities are followed up with greater urgency to secure the improvements desired, particularly in the primary phase
 - schemes of work for personal development are detailed and reflect the progression of knowledge and skills required for pupils of all ages and stages of development, particularly between the primary and the secondary phase.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the primary phase, by ensuring that:
 - daily 'free choice' activities are more closely matched to pupils' developmental needs, particularly those related to pupils' physical, communication and language needs
 - there is greater cohesion between the working practices of the speech and language therapist and teachers, in the primary phase, so that pupils make speedy progress in their language development.
- Improve personal development and welfare by increasing efforts to support pupils' smoking cessation.
- The school must meet the independent school standards, as set out in the annex of this report.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that all independent school standards are met consistently.
- In 2017, an independent fire risk assessment strongly recommended that the practice of allowing pupils to smoke on-site should cease. However, leaders' compliance with this recommendation has lacked urgency, and pupils continue to be allowed to smoke on-site. At the time of the inspection, the risk assessment procedure for managing pupils who smoke on-site was weak, and only limited evidence was provided to indicate that leaders were actively supporting pupils in smoking cessation.
- Since the last inspection, there have been several changes to the senior leadership of the school. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher are all new to their roles, although not new to the school. They are ambitious for the future, and are managing the expansion of the school's vocational offer at 'The Works' and increasing pupil numbers effectively.
- Development planning reflects leaders' priorities for improvement. However, while plans contain detailed actions, they lack sufficiently sharply focused success criteria for them to be evaluated accurately. Consequently, leaders' self-evaluation is too generous.
- Leaders undertake regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning across the school. This has led to considerable improvements in the quality of teaching in vocational studies. It has been less effective in bringing about improvements in the primary phase. This is because, until very recently, identified areas for improvement have not been followed up with sufficient urgency. This has affected the pace of pupils' progress.
- The special educational needs coordinator is very recently appointed. She has worked promptly to ensure that all pupils who have an education, health and care plan for their special educational needs receive their statutory annual review. Prior to her appointment these plans had not been completed routinely. She has delivered training to staff to support them in incorporating pupils' personal targets from their plans into their teaching. This is beginning to help staff in the primary phase plan activities that are more closely aligned to pupils' needs.
- Following the last full inspection, two English subject leaders were appointed. They have good subject knowledge and readily offer support and guidance to colleagues in the secondary department in order to help them to improve their practice. As a result, increasing proportions of pupils are now entered for GCSE and functional skills examinations. While this is heartening, their responsibilities do not extend to the primary phase, where improvements in English are slower.
- Acorn Education and Care Group have very recently reorganised its senior leadership structure to provide clearer lines of accountability. They have ensured that all settings receive focused support and oversight. They seek the advice of external partners to verify their work. It is too soon to see the full impact of this on the school's leadership.

Governance

- Governors are skilled professionals who use their wide ranging skills to support and challenge the school.
- They receive detailed reports from the headteacher which give them important information relating to pupils' outcomes, attendance and the quality of teaching. This enables them to question leaders effectively.
- Governors have not acted with sufficient urgency to enforce the company's no smoking policy on the school site. Evidence from the spring term meetings, in 2019, indicates governors' intention to impose a smoking ban across the school from September of this year, two years after the recommendation from the independent fire safety officer.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is available on its website. It is compliant with the latest government guidance.
- All employment checks are undertaken on those adults wishing to work at the school in order to ensure that they are fit to do so. Such checks are held on a central record. Some minor administrative omissions were put right during the inspection.
- Staff undertake regular training to ensure that they are well informed of legislative changes and that they receive timely reminders of the important role they play in keeping pupils safe. Daily briefings at the start and end of the school day ensure that staff are vigilant in noticing any changes in pupils' demeanour, or in receiving important localised information to help keep pupils safe.
- Staff know pupils and their families exceptionally well. Many pupils arrive at school with significant vulnerabilities, most of which are managed and supported effectively. The dedicated family support workers play a pivotal role in strengthening the relationships between home and school.
- The designated safeguarding staff ensure that pupils are kept as safe as they can be. They meet regularly to ensure that there is close supervision of pupils. They have developed strong working relationships with a range of professional partners, over many years. They play an important role in liaising with the nine local authorities who place pupils at the school. They do not shy away from offering professional challenge if they feel it is in the pupils' best interests.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The teaching of vocational studies is very effective. Teachers are highly skilled and knowledgeable and they set high expectations for pupils' attainment and attitudes. Pupils respond accordingly and are excelling in their achievements as a result. By the time they leave, most pupils gain nationally recognised accreditations. The teaching of motor mechanics, construction and painting and decorating is particularly praiseworthy.
- In the secondary phase the quality of teaching is good. In particular, the teaching of English has improved considerably since the last inspection. Leaders acted quickly to

employ additional English teachers to strengthen the quality of teaching in this subject. This has paid dividends. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan their lessons to build on what pupils already know and can do effectively. Pupils' books show that pupils are writing more and comprehending more effectively from their starting points. As a result, in the current school year, 22 pupils, aged 16 to 19, are preparing to take English GCSE and functional skills qualifications. This represents a considerable improvement on the previous year, when only one pupil was able to do so.

- The teaching of outdoor education is very effective. Teachers work alongside accredited independent trainers to provide pupils with a range of residential and expedition opportunities. Pupils embrace this aspect of provision and rise to the challenges it poses. It supplements pupils' geographical and mathematical skills well and contributes to their developing social skills.
- The quality of teaching in the primary phase is less effective and pupils' progress is slower as a result. Teachers do not use the advice, guidance and expertise from other professionals well enough, particularly those from speech and language therapy, to inform their planning. Consequently, activities are not as consistently well matched to pupils' needs as they are in the secondary phase. For example, a review of pupils' work showed that, at times, pupils are asked to answer complex comprehension questions when they still need support to recognise simple sentences.
- Daily free choice activities form a large part of the day for pupils in the primary and specialist units. However, staff do not always plan activities that will build on previous learning and consolidate pupils' knowledge and skills effectively. This means that although pupils are occupied, it is often difficult to determine the extent to which such activities are supporting pupils' learning. When this happens, pupils' progress slows.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Leaders continue to allow pupils to smoke on the school site. A designated smoking area is available for pupils to use, and it is supervised by staff. However, at the time of the inspection, the associated risk assessment did not reflect the health and safety implications of this practice, both for pupils who smoke and pupils who do not. This includes the primary-aged pupils who visit the site for some of their lessons.
- Leaders have not been systematic in supporting aspects of pupils' health and welfare relating to smoking cessation. Although family support advisers explained that they make home visits to signpost parents to various smoking help groups, no formal record of this is maintained. Leaders were unable to provide evidence of a sustained programme of proactive support given to pupils to help them with their smoking addiction.
- Focused days throughout the school year are used to raise pupils' awareness of British values and to support pupils to keep themselves safe. However, leaders explained that activities were left to individual staff to determine. There is not a detailed scheme of work that sits behind this, which identifies precisely the knowledge, skills and understanding pupils will acquire at different ages or stages of development. For example, pupils in the

secondary department demonstrated a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe on the internet, but younger pupils struggled to articulate an age-appropriate understanding.

- Leaders invest heavily in supporting pupils' emotional wellbeing. All pupils receive a daily session to help repair their self-confidence and build their self-esteem. This contributes to pupils' improving attitudes to learning and in raising their aspirations for the future. Pupils value this investment greatly, and as one pupil told inspectors, 'If I hadn't come here, I'd have been dead or in prison.'
- Leaders deal with a range of behavioural issues, some linked to the use of inappropriate racist and homophobic language. A review of the behaviour records shows that staff deal with such incidents quickly and sensitively. Such is the confidence that pupils have in staff that pupils say that they feel safe in school. Those pupils who spoke to inspectors said that there is always a trusted member of staff in whom they can confide should they have any concerns.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. Leaders have ensured that all schemes of work acknowledge where staff can make relevant links to support pupils' development in this important area.
- Careers information, advice and guidance are provided to all pupils and students in all phases of the school. Leaders ensure that pupils' knowledge and understanding, of the many and varied opportunities open to them, are built progressively from the primary phase onwards. It is a well-considered programme, and it provides pupils with a wide range of experiences, including college and workplace opportunities. Leaders continue to track pupils when they leave the school, and they continue to offer support and advice when required.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- All pupils enter the school with significant and complex behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Staff work hard to develop strong and trusting relationships with pupils. For the most part, pupils are able to conduct themselves well and to be respectful to each other and to adults.
- Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are handled appropriately by staff. Staff work hard to moderate pupils' behaviours and to enable pupils to reflect on their own development. Although still above the national average, the proportion of fixed-term exclusions is reducing. There have been no permanent exclusions at the school and only a very small proportion of placements break down and are unsuccessful.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have acted to improve pupils' attendance effectively. They increased the number of dedicated family liaison officers to ensure that pupils and their families are supported to attend school regularly and on time. Although pupils' overall attendance is below the national average, this represents considerable improvement, especially as many pupils have spent long periods of time outside of the school system. Leaders know this is a continuing priority for improvement.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school with a variety of complex social and emotional needs. Some pupils have an autism spectrum diagnosis and associated learning difficulties. Leaders work hard to assess pupils' needs accurately and to establish strong relationships quickly.
- Students in Years 12 and 13 learn alongside pupils in key stage 4. They gain important academic and vocational qualifications that allow them to progress to the next stage of their education.
- The purpose-built vocational centre, 'The Works', provides an excellent resource for pupils and students to study vocational courses. Pupils' attainment in construction, painting and decorating and motor mechanics is particularly strong.
- Leaders' determined efforts to ensure that all pupils leave with important qualifications to enable them to pursue their interests is to be commended. Increasing proportions of pupils have been entered for GCSE and vocational qualifications. In 2018, all school leavers progressed to employment, training or apprenticeships. This is a tremendous achievement, particularly for pupils who had long periods of time out of the school system and huge gaps in their learning.
- Over time, there has been a steady increase in the number of pupils attaining recognised and appropriate accreditations, including in English and mathematics. In the last school year, 115 accreditations were awarded to 42 pupils aged between 16 and 19. This year the number of entries has increased further, and predicted accreditations are expected to double. This represents excellent progress from pupils' variable starting points.
- Pupils in key stage 3 are making good progress. Their progress is tracked carefully across the year, with regular assessments undertaken in all subjects. Progress information is detailed and is used wisely to inform planning and to adjust interventions or to organise additional support. Such good progress is reflected in pupils' work in books.
- Leaders prioritise outdoor education. All pupils receive the opportunity to attain accreditations in outdoor learning. Many pupils embrace these opportunities and excel, and some receive the very highest accolade.
- Pupils' outcomes in the primary phase are less secure. A review of current pupils' work in books shows that pupils' academic progress is limited. At the start of the academic year, staff were unaware of the detailed speech and language reports available on pupils. This led to a disconnect between pupils' abilities and the demands of planned activities. Until recently, leaders' actions were slow to remedy this. Consequently, pupils' progress in the primary phase has been much slower than that of pupils in other phases, particularly in the consolidation of basic literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills.
- Leaders promote reading for pleasure, and pupils are encouraged to do so by regular visits to the library. Pupils in the primary phase are heard to read every day, and they enjoy being read to from a class story. Quality texts and stories are also used as a stimulus for pupils' learning. Younger pupils receive a daily programme of phonics teaching. However, leaders are not recording pupils' phonics progress routinely. This makes it difficult to gauge how quickly and successfully pupils are acquiring their early phonics reading skills.

School details

Unique reference number	135216
DfE registration number	384/6348
Inspection number	10093645

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	76
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Group
Chair	Lynette Edwards
Headteacher	Darren Singh
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,000
Telephone number	01924 366 242
Website	www.meadowcroftschoo.com
Email address	info@meadowcroftschoo.com
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 February 2017

Information about this school

- Meadowcroft is an independent day special educational needs school, catering for pupils with social, emotional or mental health difficulties. Some have an autism spectrum diagnosis and associated learning difficulties.
- The school is part of Acorn Education and Care group. It operates over three sites, within the centre of Wakefield. It serves a much wider geographical location, with pupils referred from, and funded by, nine local authorities.
- The school is smaller than the average all-through school.

- At the time of the inspection, there were 76 pupils on roll, all of whom have an education, health and care plan. The school has a waiting list for places.
- The previous standard inspection took place in February 2017, with a subsequent no-notification one-day inspection in November 2018.
- The school does not use alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in all phases of the school. The vast majority of these observations were undertaken with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the managing director, assistant director, headteacher, senior leaders, school staff and pupils. An inspector spoke with parents and considered the seven responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including three free-text responses.
- Policies and documents associated with the independent school standards were evaluated.
- The buildings on all three school sites were toured to check for compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

Sara Roe

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school must meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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