

Inspection of Meadowcroft School

24 Bar Lane, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 4AD

Inspection dates: 29 June–1 July 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a good school. Pupils enjoy the wide range of subjects and courses they study. They also like the rewards they earn for meeting their targets. Teaching groups are small, and pupils receive a lot of individual support. Pupils say they feel safe and can easily talk to staff about any worries.

Pupils who come to Meadowcroft may have struggled to cope in their previous setting or may not have been attending school. School leaders quickly work out what pupils know and can do. Each pupil has their own 'passport' that explains what will help them to learn and be happy at school. Staff use this information well.

School leaders recognise how important it is that pupils become confident readers. Leaders make sure that staff have the training and resources to teach reading effectively. Pupils are proud of becoming better readers.

Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils say bullying is rare and if anyone is unkind staff sort it out quickly. Some pupils can be unsettled at times around the school. However, staff are quick to help these pupils get back to learning.

Most parents are happy with the school. One parent said, 'this school changes children's lives: it is not just an education'.

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

Leaders are ambitious for pupils. Leaders have designed a curriculum that helps pupils understand themselves and their world. The subjects taught match the national curriculum. Pupils take a wide range of recognised qualifications. These include functional skills awards, vocational qualifications, and GCSEs. Students in the sixth form follow plans for specific qualifications and prepare for independent living. They can take additional GCSEs and trade qualifications.

Leaders have written well-sequenced curriculum plans for most subjects. However, the long-term plan for mathematics is not as developed as other subject plans. Leaders are aware of this. They have recently appointed a new lead teacher for mathematics. Leaders are in the process of reviewing the plans for mathematics.

Leaders recognise that pupils who join Meadowcroft may have missed a lot of school and many find learning hard. Over the past two years the proprietor has employed more specialist staff with expertise in supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These staff collect a wide range of information on pupils before they start at the school. Teachers use this information to plan lessons that meet pupils' individual needs.

Leaders have introduced a whole-school approach to assessment. Each subject plan is linked to a subject tracker. This document explains what pupils need to know and remember in each subject. Teachers regularly check how pupils are doing in their

subject and record this on the tracker document. Leaders monitor this information closely and put in extra support for pupils who need it.

Leaders recognise the importance of teaching pupils to read. Most pupils who join the school are at an early stage of reading. Leaders make learning to read a priority for all pupils across the school. Specialist staff check each pupil's phonics knowledge and reading level. This happens when a pupil starts at Meadowcroft and is reviewed each term. Staff teach reading well and pupils gain the knowledge and skills they need to become more confident readers.

Pupils at Meadowcroft need specialist support for their social, emotional, and mental health needs. The staff to pupil ratio is high and reflects the needs of the pupils in the school. Over the past two years, leaders have introduced more therapeutic approaches to support pupils' behavioural needs. Staff help pupils to stay calm and be able to make positive choices. A small number of parents say this was not always the case.

Some pupils still show challenging behaviours at times. For example, some pupils will use bad language. This is more likely to happen when they are frustrated or anxious. Leaders know that pupils need to be able to use spoken language effectively. Leaders recognise that there is more work to do to improve pupils' social communication.

Leaders believe that personal, social and health education (PSHE) is important for their pupils. There is a specialist subject leader for PSHE and three lessons a week allocated on the timetable. Pupils learn about themselves and the world they live in. Pupils have opportunities to develop their talents and try new things. For example, many pupils at the school follow the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils are taught about fundamental British values, including tolerance and respect. Visiting speakers come into school to share their experiences with pupils. Leaders check that any presentation to pupils is unbiased and appropriate in content.

Pupils learn about future careers from an early age. There is an independent careers adviser who works with older pupils. Pupils get support to move to the next stage of learning or to enter employment. In recent years a high proportion of pupils have moved from the school into further education or training.

The proprietor and school leaders have a shared vision for the school. They are committed to improving the future life chances of the pupils in their care. The proprietor provides a wide range of training for staff. Staff say that leaders are mindful of staff workload. Most staff feel well supported by school leaders.

The proprietor has set up a board of governors to oversee the leadership and management of the school. Governors meet termly and scrutinise information provided by school leaders. Governors visit the school regularly to check on the experiences of staff and pupils. Governors ensure that the premises meet the requirements of the independent school standards.

The proprietor and governors have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They are aware of the importance of the Equality Act 2010 and are proud of how this is implemented at Meadowcroft. The school's safeguarding policy is on the school's website. The headteacher has ensured that this policy is compliant with current statutory guidance. The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards continue to be met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff recognise that pupils have additional needs which make them more vulnerable to exploitation. Staff teach pupils how to stay safe in their community and online.

The proprietor ensures that all staff receive training in safeguarding and child protection.

The designated lead for safeguarding (DSL) and her deputies receive enhanced training. The DSL knows how to identify pupils who may need help from external agencies. She is quick to make referrals when these are necessary. The DSL has accurate and secure records of all referrals and the outcomes. School leaders know about safer recruitment. The headteacher makes sure that all required checks are completed on any adult who works or volunteers at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- School leaders have ensured that most subjects have well-developed, sequential plans. However, the long-term plan in mathematics is not informing the medium-term plans effectively. This means that teachers do not revisit essential, mathematical knowledge consistently. This is affecting pupils' mastery of mathematical methods. School leaders should complete their review of planning in mathematics and ensure that all subjects have well-sequenced, long-term plans.
- Staff work hard to model appropriate language and to help pupils communicate their feelings. However, some pupils use language that can cause offence, even if this is not intended. This is affecting those pupils' ability to communicate successfully in a range of social situations. School leaders have begun to analyse pupils' use of language. School leaders should progress this work quickly and devise appropriate strategies to reduce pupils' use of inappropriate language.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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 provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	135216
DfE registration number	384/6348
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	10196865
Type of school	Independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	94
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Acorn Education and Care Ltd
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Darren Singh
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,523 to £58,254
Telephone number	01924 366242
Website	www.meadowcroftschoo.com
Email address	info@meadowcroftschoo.com
Date of previous inspection	21–23 May 2019

Information about this school

- Meadowcroft is an independent day special school, catering for pupils with social, emotional, and mental health needs. Some pupils have a diagnosis of autism and additional learning difficulties.
- The school is part of Acorn Education and Care Limited, which is owned by the Outcomes First Group.
- The school operates over three sites within the centre of Wakefield. The two other sites are located at The Works, Garden Street, Wakefield WF1 1DX and The Gallery, Wentworth Terrace, Wakefield WF1 3QW. Pupils are referred to the school from a wide range of local authorities and are funded by those authorities.
- At the time of the inspection there were 94 pupils on roll, all of whom have an education, health and care plan.
- The previous standard inspection took place in May 2019. There was a subsequent monitoring inspection in December 2019 and a further monitoring inspection in December 2020.
- The school does not use any alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. We discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in our evaluation.

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than was previously planned. This was because of a concern received by the DfE about how effectively the school was meeting the needs of its pupils.
- This inspection was carried out with no notice. The lead inspector phoned the school shortly before going onto the school's site to ensure compliance with the school's COVID-19 protocols.
- We met with senior leaders, including the DSL. We also met with a range of other staff. We held an online meeting with the proprietor and the chair of the governing body.

- We undertook a tour of the school's three sites and visited the classrooms and social areas. We checked the school buildings and grounds against the independent school standards.
- We did deep dives into reading; mathematics; English; and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The deep dive for each subject included a meeting with curriculum leaders and a review of subject documents and plans. The deep dive also involved lesson visits, meetings with pupils and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- We visited lessons of other subjects taught at the school and looked at pupils' work from these subjects.
- We observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the school day, at lunchtime and in lessons. We spoke with pupils and observed them reading to their teacher.
- We scrutinised school documents and the arrangements to safeguard pupils. This included checking the school's safeguarding systems and the single central record, meeting with the DSL and speaking with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- We had contact with parents through telephone calls and written comments sent in during the inspection. We looked at responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. We considered surveys completed by 47 staff. We circulated surveys to pupils but did not have any responses.
- We sought the views of local authorities who commission places at the school. We spoke to the local authority designated officer to get her views on safeguarding procedures at the school.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alison Aitchison

Her Majesty's Inspector

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