



Office for Standards
in Education

Inspection Report

MEADOW BANK SCHOOL

Unique Reference Number: 104738

LEA: Liverpool

Inspection Dates: 6 – 8 July 2004

Reporting Inspector: Janet Thompson HMI

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INTRODUCTION

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of Meadow Bank School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key for inspection grades:

Grade 1	Very good
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Adequate
Grade 4	Not adequate

Description of the school

Meadow Bank School is a day special school for pupils with moderate and complex learning difficulties aged 5 to 18 years. Currently there are 135 pupils on roll. A much higher than average number of pupils is eligible for free school meals. The school has provision for a number of pupils post 16, outreach service and primary speech and language unit. Older pupils have access to a range of college courses and work experience opportunities. The school is being reorganised in September 2004 to become a secondary provision for pupils 11 – 19 with complex learning difficulties.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

This is a very successful school that provides good value for money. The school implements its vision of equality for all, raises achievement and promotes personal development of pupils in its care through the high levels of commitment from all staff. The school is aware of its own strengths and how it can improve further and is taking appropriate action as required, for example in developing the outreach service and meeting the more complex needs of pupils. The curriculum is carefully designed to ensure that all pupils can access a wide range of subjects and achieve success. Additional support is offered for pupils with more complex needs; however, more use could be made of alternative methods of communication around the school. The opportunities for pupils to work alongside mainstream peers is limited. The school makes very good use of staff expertise and experience to meet the needs of pupils but they do not always receive timely support they receive from external agencies. Standards are high, given the pupils starting points. They make exceptional progress and are happy and well motivated. The quality of teaching is a strength and an important reason why pupils behave and achieve well and enjoy learning. The school provides good value for money.

Grade: 1

Improvement since the last inspection

The school has made very good progress since its last inspection. All key issues have been addressed and good teaching has been maintained. Accommodation has been improved considerably and standards have risen, particularly at Key Stage 4. Parents and pupils speak warmly of how the school has changed for the better.

Grade: 1

Capacity to improve

With its strong and effective senior management team the school is well placed to continue its drive for improvement. The opportunities provided by its new structure will enable even greater concentration on its areas of strength and expertise.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

The School Should:

- increase opportunities for pupils to work alongside their mainstream peers
- further develop outreach support and the training of staff in mainstream schools
- consider extending opportunities for supporting pupils who have complex language needs to access day to day information in the school
- continue to work with other agencies to ensure that they give a more timely response in supporting the pupils' needs.

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

The inspection team agrees with the schools' self evaluation that achievement and standards at the school are very good. The standards pupils achieve are very high given their capabilities and starting points. When pupils enter the school their performance is well below what is expected for other youngsters of their age; this is especially true for pupils at Key Stage 1. Trends over the last three years indicate continued improvements at all key stages. Achievement at Key Stages 3 and 4 is very good; GCSE results are three times the national average for this type of school. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils achieve well in all subjects, but results are particularly outstanding this year in science and history. Pupil progress in the older year groups successfully builds upon the learning in the primary classes. All pupils leave school with external accreditation.

Demanding targets are set for pupils that successfully extend their learning. The pupils have a very good understanding of their own targets and what they need to do to improve. This is supported by sensitive marking of their work. Strong teaching and shared high expectations are key factors in motivating pupils to learn.

Grade: 1

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The school thinks the pupils' personal development is very good and the inspectors agree that it is a strength of the school. The pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour around the school are exemplary. They enjoy lessons, work hard and are well motivated. The pupils' determination to succeed makes a strong contribution to their very good progress. Attendance is good throughout the school and punctuality is excellent.

Pupils and staff show each other a high level of respect and pupils are confident when talking to adults. The school encourages pupils to support each other and is successful in ensuring that they have a good understanding of each other's needs. A very good behaviour policy with clear reward system, actions and consequences has been successfully developed in consultation with the pupils. As a result they have a keen ownership and very good understanding of the systems in place. The pupils become mature, caring, sensitive and accepting of others' beliefs and cultural traditions. The school council is fully involved in the life of the school and is encouraged to make suggestions for improvement in the school and beyond. Meadow Bank is the only school of this nature that has taken up the opportunity for pupils to be represented on the Liverpool Young People's Parliament.

The schools involvement in the healthy schools award scheme is used to reinforce and promote pupils' awareness of healthy lifestyles. The pupils enthusiastically take on responsibility for their own environment. Spiritual development is well promoted particularly in assemblies where pupils are encouraged to reflect on their experiences in order to make sense of the world.

Grade: 1

QUALITY OF PROVISION

The inspection confirms the school's view that the quality of provision is very good.

Teaching is good. All lessons seen by inspectors were at least adequate and most were of high quality. All teaching was based on a good knowledge of the pupils' prior learning. Staff are skilled in encouraging pupils to build on their achievements and give them clear guidance on how to improve. All staff are involved in ensuring that pupils' personal skills and self esteem are successfully developed.

Nearly all teaching is lively and well planned, with exciting resources used to make learning enjoyable. The teachers structure lessons carefully to enable all pupils to succeed. The staff use sensitive humour to create a relaxed but motivating environment, which encourages pupils to test their ideas and offer their own opinions. The skilled learning support assistants are well directed and have a clear understanding of the levels of support required by different pupils.

Teachers use the good information about the pupils' additional needs, provided by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, to inform lesson planning. Communication symbols are used to support some pupils, however this good practice is not extended to the written text displayed around the school. Parents and pupils have an opportunity to contribute to the development of challenging curriculum targets.

Despite the best efforts of the school some additional services are slow to respond to requests to assess and support pupils with more complex needs. The school's speech and language unit effectively develops communication skills for primary aged pupils, and language groups supported by specialist staff successfully assist older pupils to continue to improve social communication skills.

The Curriculum is very good. There is a full range of subjects and pupils have access to a wide range of additional opportunities which enliven and enhance their experience, for example, residential activities and after school clubs in soccer, art and music. Older pupils are supported to access a range of college courses and work experience placements designed to meet their individual needs. The school provides very good learning opportunities relevant to the pupils' needs, interests and future life. The primary department offers very good learning opportunities to extend the pupils' early experiences. Teaching and learning are organised in a way that ensures progression for pupils as they move through the school whilst at the same time matching their learning needs. Opportunities are provided for pupils to contribute to the local community, for example, older pupils are involved in a community garden project and all pupils have been involved in raising money for charities. There are limited opportunities for pupils to learn alongside their mainstream peers.

The school offers a safe and secure learning environment where pupils are well supported to develop the skills they need for their future lives. The high priority given to teaching appropriate social skills and ensuring the pupils have 'a voice' permeates all aspects of the work of the school. Pupils are very good advocates for the school and report that they feel safe, valued and appreciated. Learning mentors offer good support for pupils and their families. Parents are extremely positive about the outstanding commitment of all staff in caring for their children.

Grade: 1

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school have had considerable success in raising achievement and developing the very good personal development for pupils. They judge themselves to be good, but the evidence from the inspection demonstrates that leadership and management is actually very good.

The headteacher's strong leadership is instrumental in driving the school forward. He has a clear vision for the school which has resulted in high expectations for pupils' achievement and then social development. The staff are committed to high standards and a quality experience for all pupils throughout their school life. Successful team work is highly valued and all staff, pupils, parents and governors are loyal to, and proud of, their school.

The senior management team ensures that the individual needs of all pupils are met. Pupils' welfare is central to all activities in the school; bullying and all forms of discrimination are not tolerated. There are productive links with other services, for example Connexions, that enable them to secure the best possible placements in education and training. There are regular and careful checks of the performance of staff and pupils. Staff development is particularly strong and all staff are offered opportunities to gain additional experience and qualifications, which help them meet the complex needs of the pupils. The senior management team has given staff strong and sensitive support through a challenging period of reorganisation and transition.

The developing outreach service provided by the school has begun to support pupils in mainstream schools and has had some early success in enabling them to make significant progress. The team now provides training packages for staff working in mainstream, which are much valued by the schools concerned.

The school has creative approaches to parental links and these are beginning to encourage greater involvement of parents at all stages in their children's education. The governing body effectively carries out all its responsibilities. The governors are supportive and most are fully involved in the life of the school. Funding has been used effectively and creatively to enhance the school's facilities.

Grade: 1

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