

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Meadowgate Academy

Meadowgate Lane, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 2JH

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 April 2025

Outcome

Meadowgate Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Michelle Flanz. This school is currently the only school in the Affinity Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Lynne Pritchard.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a highly nurturing school. Whether pupils join from the start, in the early years, or later in their educational journey, they get the right support straight away. This enables pupils to settle well and feel part of the 'Meadowgate family'. Pupils grow in confidence as they acquire and practise new social and learning skills.

Staff have high expectations for pupils, whatever their starting points and challenges. They have a relentless focus on finding the best way to meet the needs of pupils. They review and adjust their provision to do this. Staff work collaboratively with other specialist professionals and families to understand pupils' needs. As a result, they put effective strategies in place so that pupils can succeed. Older pupils develop the independence and resilience they need for their next steps in life.

Behaviour around the school is good. Pupils feel secure in the well-established routines and expectations throughout the day. As a result, the school provides an oasis of calm for pupils. They learn how to work and play alongside, and sometimes with, each other. Staff are universally encouraging, striving to spot and celebrate even the smallest successes from the start.

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

The school takes great care to know and understand its pupils. As a result, it provides a highly tailored curriculum to meet individual needs. Many pupils arrive with multiple and complex challenges. The school takes a holistic approach to 'getting it right from the start'. Leaders put in place a range of strategies such as bespoke behaviour or mental health support and medical care plans. This enables pupils to settle and access their learning. The school knows that staff need to be highly skilled to put these strategies in place well. The school provides effective training and ongoing support for staff. It draws on its own expertise as well as working with external specialists to do this. As a result, staff are confident and skilled to carry out their roles well.

There is a strong, effective focus on enabling pupils to develop communication skills and independence. The curriculum for communication and language is flexible and responsive to pupils' needs. The school has made the right changes to secure consistent approaches by staff. This helps to minimise any gaps or slippage in learning at transition points. Staff use their ongoing checks to spot when pupils may benefit from changing their learning pathways. They make these adjustments smoothly. Pupils develop their communication skills using a range of strategies and devices, such as braille and picture exchange systems. Over time pupils increase the complexity of their communication. For some pupils, learning to read and write is an appropriate next step. Staff skilfully use phonics and bespoke strategies to help these pupils secure and apply reading and writing skills.

Teachers meet the wide range of needs in their class very effectively. Staff are skilled at checking understanding and adjusting provision 'in the moment'. Teachers make lessons engaging with first hand resources and stimulating activities. They check understanding and model tasks or language again for those who need it.

In response to the needs and interests of pupils, the school reviews and adjusts the curriculum for older learners. Staff ensure that these pupils have the skills that they need as they move into adulthood. For example, 'the bungalow' is set up so pupils can learn and practise life skills. Through this bespoke curriculum, some pupils learn important skills such as how to use money or to ride a bike.

Careers education involves meaningful and sustained work opportunities to support pupils' interests, developmental stage and health conditions. The onsite 'Bramley's café' is a really purposeful example of the school's work to build confidence and independence alongside practical skills.

Pupils' attendance has improved over recent years. The school rightly wants pupils to be in school as much as possible so they can benefit from all that is available to them. Staff develop strong and effective relationships with families from the start. This gives parents and carers the confidence that school is a safe and caring place where their children will learn.

The school carefully supports pupils to behave well throughout the day. Recent changes to behaviour systems have strengthened this work. Staff are knowledgeable in how to help pupils learn to manage their feelings. They have a precise understanding of how to best support individuals. At break times staff show high levels of care and attention to meet pupils needs. Pupils benefit from time in quiet spaces or using carefully chosen games equipment.

Trustees know the school well through their diligent checks. They are reflective and strive for ongoing development. Since the last inspection, the school continues to make improvements so that it can continue to offer the highest standards of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the third ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Meadowgate school, to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in October 2011.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	144055
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10378566
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	44
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lynne Pritchard
Principal	Michelle Flanz
Website	www.meadowgate.cambs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides specialist education for pupils with a wide range of difficulties and disabilities, including autistic spectrum disorder, multi-sensory impairments, profound and severe needs and speech, language and communication needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered to take pupils from the age of two-years-old but during the inspection there were no pupils of that age on roll.
- The school does not use any off-site alternative providers of education.
- Meadowgate Academy converted to become an academy school in October 2011. When its predecessor school, Meadowgate School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding for overall effectiveness.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with school leaders including the headteacher and deputy head teacher, senior school leaders and other middle leaders including curriculum leaders.
- The lead inspector met with trustees, including the chair of trustees. She also spoke with external consultants who know the school well.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teaching and support staff, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. They spoke with pupils about their views of the school and their learning.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free text comments. The lead inspector also spoke with some parents and considered other communication from parents.
- Inspectors met with staff to gather their views of the school. They also considered the responses from the Ofsted survey for staff.

Inspection team

Lynne Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sally Garrett

Ofsted Inspector

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