

The Meadows

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	830/6035
Unique Reference Number	135241
Inspection number	316407
Inspection dates	2 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Meadows is a small independent school that admits students aged 11 to 16 years. 6 students attend the school. They are in the care of several different local authorities. None has a statement of special educational need, but all have been permanently excluded, or withdrawn, from their previous school or educational unit because of their extreme emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school aims to develop students' self-confidence and their attitude to learning by providing a safe and encouraging setting with a wide range of academic and outdoor activities. The ultimate aim is to enable students to leave with sufficient skills and confidence to do well in society, further study and work. This is the school's first published report.

The students' home shares the same site as the school. It is owned by the same proprietor, and there is considerable liaison between the two, but they are essentially separate. Not all students in the home attend this school.

Evaluation of the school

This is an outstanding school in which students make outstanding progress, from extremely low levels of behaviour, attitude, attendance and academic prowess to a remarkably high level of confidence, cooperation and academic achievement. Provision for students' care, welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All regulations for independent schools are met. The premises are extremely good, almost brand new, and include grounds that add much to students' opportunities for play, physical activities, conservation and environmental study. The school is a testament to the excellent leadership, management and teaching shown by the headteacher, working closely in conjunction with the Head of Care and the proprietor.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding because it offers a very good range of twelve academic subjects to GCSE level, along with the option to study many more subjects at a lower level. These are supplemented by particularly good personal, social and citizenship courses to help students' individual development, and by a very good range of physical, outdoor and leisure pursuits, including the 'Peak Awards', and the higher level 'Duke of Edinburgh Awards'. The provision for careers education is very effective, including the close links with the Connexions Partnership which is especially strong for Year 11 students. The school meets its aims: the excellent

quality of its leadership, management and teaching is a testament to the effectiveness of the headteacher, who works closely with the Head of Care and the proprietor. The 'one-team' approach by school and home staff supports many clubs and evening courses, visits and activities to extend students' learning. Staff contribute to this by bringing their own young children to school, for instance, as part of the 'Baby Think Twice' Child Development course that is run after school. Additional activities include, for example, kayaking, climbing, mountain biking, art and music therapy, and a recent 'Spanish evening'.

The outstanding quality of the teaching and assessment are the result of confident and experienced staff who know their subjects and the students well. They teach with enthusiasm across a wide range of subjects, motivating the students to want to learn, to take part in many different activities and to enjoy themselves. Teachers often incorporate the use of computers in the work that is set for students, and also successfully develop students' language and literacy skills in virtually all lessons through extensive discussions and written tasks. Relationships between staff and students are very positive, friendly and mutually respectful. Lessons run at a very good pace with activities that are often very challenging, whether academic, practical or outdoors. Tasks are very well matched to students' individual needs, and students receive much guidance, encouragement and support. Teachers assess students' skills and attitudes on entry, and follow this with regular re-assessments and comprehensive reports every six months. The school is experimenting with a new way to make the assessments simpler and organised in a way that would allow staff, students and carers to form a clearer picture of individual students' progress, as well as demonstrate whether or not some subjects have a greater success rate than others. Students have clear long-term learning aims, especially for their academic studies that are leading to AQA, Entry Level or GCSE qualifications. They greatly value their targets, and appreciate knowing what they need to do to achieve them. As one student said, '*Teachers have their own special way and are really funny and do lots for us.*'

Students' outstanding learning in lessons is reflected in their equally outstanding progress and achievement over time. Many enter the school with extremely low self-esteem and considerable behavioural and emotional problems. Very quickly, however, they settle, and develop a much more positive attitude to learning. They pay attention, join in, ask questions and produce written work that is a credit to them as well as their teachers. One student said, '*I never thought I'd be doing GCSEs.*' Year 11 students currently are studying twelve different subjects each at GCSE level, and expect to pass in all of them. Last year, both Year 11 students passed their GCSE in ten subjects, with half of them awarded A to C grades. A Year 10 student also passed his GCSE in several subjects. All three students moved to colleges to continue their studies at GCSE, GNVQ and A level standards.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students develop their self-confidence and self-esteem extremely well.

They learn a much greater respect for the law, through in-school lessons as well as visits to, for instance, court cases. They develop deep respect for each other and their property, and accept responsibility for their own behaviour, which is outstanding. They help each other with their work and in sorting out their personal difficulties. Particularly through many visits in the locality and much further afield, they learn a great deal about different services that are available, and they back this up with detailed lesson activities. There is good awareness of other cultures and good preparation for life in a multi-cultural society.

Students are very well motivated, and enjoy their education, as seen in the remarkable improvement in their attendance, which is 94%. Often, they have not attended a school for several years prior to their admission here, but now attend almost every day. An example of students' changed attitudes and pride in their own attainments was seen in a 'thank-you' card that one sent to the school, *'Thank you for the help you've given me in class. I couldn't have achieved my grades without you. I really appreciate it.'*

Students' academic and general learning skills, and their level of cooperation with adults and with each other all improve greatly. This puts them in an extremely good position to go on to the next stage in their careers with well-placed confidence. They contribute very well to their own society by, for example, helping to create a conservation area, lake and vegetable garden within the grounds, and also taking part in sponsored events for the 'Race for Life' and Marie Curie charities.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

This aspect of the provision is outstanding. Staff are extremely well trained in safeguarding requirements and procedures as well as in health and safety issues. They make very good use of their knowledge and skills by taking students on a variety of adventurous pursuits off-site every week. Students also take part in regular physical education and team-building exercises. The high level of staffing helps to ensure proper supervision on all occasions. The school has achieved the 'Health-Promoting School' award and gained students' willing cooperation. Hot midday meals are served in the home setting, which are very well planned and prepared to be healthy, and are greatly enjoyed by the students. Although a small minority of students smoke, the school takes strong measures to promote their health, personal hygiene, sex education and avoidance of dangers.

The school fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff are checked thoroughly according to the most recent requirements. The school keeps very well organised records of staff and students' backgrounds, and any in-school incidents or complaints in a confidential and correct manner.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are almost new and are maintained to a high standard of decoration and cleanliness. The grounds are in a quiet rural setting. They are spacious, and incorporate the students' home building, as well as a lake, small football pitch, grassed areas, vegetable garden and conservation area, all of which are regularly used and partly maintained by the students. Extremely good use is also made of local facilities, from shopping centres, theatres and art galleries to Peak District caverns and the moorland trails and fells.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

This provision is good. The school keeps all interested parties well informed about students' progress through a very well produced and illustrated annual prospectus, twice-annual individual reports, and more frequent reports when requested. Only one parent and one local authority offered their views about the school. They were almost entirely positive, as were the views given by students and care workers in questionnaires and discussions.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures for managing complaints are thorough and are fully compliant with all the relevant regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

School details

Name of school	The Meadows		
DCSF number	830/6035		
Unique reference number	135241		
Type of school	Special day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 2006		
Age range of students	11-16 years		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 1	Girls: 5	Total: 6
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 1	Girls: 5	Total: 6
Annual fees (day students)	£60,000		
Address of school	Country Care Beech Lane Dove Holes Derbyshire SK17 8DJ		
Telephone number	01298 814000		
Fax number	01298 814777		
Email address	rachel.dowle@countrycare.org.uk		
Headteacher	Ms Rachel Dowle		
Proprietor	Mr David Cathcart		
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts		
Dates of inspection	2 May 2008		