

Inspection of The Meadows

Country Care, The Meadows, Beech Lane, Dove Holes, Derbyshire SK17 8DJ

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 June 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Outstanding

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Strong and trusting relationships are a fundamental part of this school's success. Pupils have often had a disjointed educational experience before coming to this school. Their attendance improves markedly over time thanks to the patience and persistence of staff. Pupils feel safe and well looked after. In the words of one pupil, 'The staff who take care of us are the best part of this school.'

Close work between staff, key workers and therapists removes any obstacles to learning. Pupils know that staff expect them to arrive promptly to each lesson. Staff plan activities that build pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Pupils enjoy earning rewards for their positive attitudes and engagement. Their efforts help them to secure a range of suitable accreditations and qualifications.

Pupils know how staff expect them to behave. They usually get on well and show each other respect. Occasional fallings-out are resolved quickly. Pupils get better at spotting when they are becoming unsettled. They learn how to manage their emotions and feelings, with the support of the school's three therapy dogs.

Pupils appreciate visits to museums, exhibitions and the theatre to support their studies. They swim and go horse riding each week to stay physically fit. Opportunities for work experience help pupils explore their future career aspirations.

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

Leaders provide pupils with an ambitious, 'no-excuses' curriculum. Pupils learn academic and creative subjects. Leaders sometimes modify the subjects they teach depending on pupils' talents and interests. Pupils follow a detailed personal development programme and engage with therapeutic support. This balanced approach to the curriculum helps pupils gain the knowledge and skills they need. They are well prepared when they move on to their next steps.

In many subjects, the curriculum is well thought out. Staff identify exactly what they want pupils to learn. They teach this information in a logical order so that pupils can make links to what they know already. For instance, pupils draw on what they know about photosynthesis in biology and equations in mathematics to learn about energy in physics. Subject-specialist staff use their knowledge to help pupils understand. They emphasise important vocabulary that pupils should know. Pupils remember these terms and use them correctly in their responses. Staff encourage them to deepen their understanding. As one pupil typically explained, 'If it is not challenging, then what is point of learning it?'

In a few subjects, however, the curriculum is not as well considered. In these subjects, staff have not thought carefully enough about what pupils need to know and when. Pupils learn new content in discrete units, rather than as part of a well-planned sequence. Staff do not have the knowledge and skills they need in these subjects to plan and deliver the curriculum as effectively.

Staff check what pupils know when they join the school. They take note of information on pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Individualised support helps staff plug gaps in pupils' knowledge and clarify any misunderstandings. Pupils know what they need to do to improve. Leaders are mindful that pupils may leave the school with little notice. They make sure that pupils gain external credit for the work they do.

There are plenty of chances for pupils to read. They often read as part of their studies. They enjoy choosing their own reading books at the local library. They share these books with the school's therapy dogs in the reading corner. Digital resources enhance these reading opportunities.

Pupils learn about relationships education and online safety. They understand the need to eat healthily, stay fit and look after their mental well-being. Their work with horses helps them appreciate the value of 'friends, freedom and food'. Pupils' involvement with local community groups has seen them plant 200 trees on the school's site, donate to a nearby homeless charity and raise money for the village primary school. These rich educational experiences develop pupils' character and independence. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils visited places of worship to learn about different faiths and a court of law to find out about the criminal justice system. Leaders plan to revive these trips soon. Pupils aspire to go to college and have successful careers when they leave school.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They are positive about leaders' support with their workload and well-being. Staff benefit from training relating to pupils' behaviour and therapeutic needs. However, support to improve staff's curriculum and subject knowledge is more limited.

The proprietor knows the school well. Members of the board work closely with school leaders to help them improve the school. However, this work is sometimes not strategic enough. Leaders' plans for improvement have a keen emphasis on pupils' personal development needs. However, their plans to improve the quality of pupils' education sometimes lack detail and focus.

The proprietor ensures that the school meets the independent school standards. Regular health and safety checks maintain the premises to a good standard. School policies reflect the latest statutory guidance. The safeguarding policy and the relationships and sex education and health education policy are available on the school's website. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders know the pupils well. They work closely with external professionals to ensure that pupils get the help they need to limit any risks that may cause them harm.

Strong relationships between staff and pupils help pupils share any worries. Staff report any concerns promptly to leaders. Daily 'huddles' keep staff informed about any changes to a pupil's circumstances. Pupils' individual risk assessments are detailed and up to date.

Pupils learn how to stay safe. They understand the risks posed by substance misuse, harmful sexual behaviour and peer pressure.

Leaders check that adults are suitable before they start working at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In a few subjects, the curriculum has not been thought through well enough. Staff have not identified exactly what pupils need to know or when they should learn this information. Pupils' learning in these subjects sometimes lacks structure and is left to chance. Leaders must ensure that, in each subject, an appropriately planned and ambitious curriculum identifies precisely what pupils need to know and when they should learn the content.
- Staff do not always have sufficient substantive and disciplinary knowledge about the subject they are teaching. When this is the case, pupils struggle to secure their subject knowledge as well as they should. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver their curriculum responsibilities.
- Leaders and the proprietor know the school well. However, they do not use this knowledge as well as they could to improve the school, particularly the quality of education. Their plans lack precise detail about what needs to improve and how they intend to go about making the changes necessary in a timely manner. Leaders need to check the impact of their work to improve the school much more closely and plan further developments in a sharper way.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	135241
DfE registration number	830/6035
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10254652
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Proprietor	Country Care Childrens Homes Ltd
Chair	David Cathcart
Headteacher	Rachel Dowle
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,859
Telephone number	01298 814000
Website	www.countrycare.org.uk
Email address	rachel.dowle@countrycare.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	2 to 4 October 2018

Information about this school

- The Meadows is an independent special school.
- The school is registered to provide full-time education for up to eight pupils.
- Pupils are placed at the school by a number of different local authorities.
- Pupils who attend the school have social, emotional and mental health needs. They may have an EHC plan.
- Students who are above the compulsory school age pursue a curriculum that is appropriate to their needs, including preparing them for adulthood.
- The school is operated by Country Care Childrens Homes Ltd.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher. The lead inspector met with two members of the board of directors, including the chair.
- The lead inspector met with the safeguarding leader to examine safeguarding records, the school's system for recruiting staff and the school's single central record. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors did deep dives in four subjects: English, science, humanities and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with staff to discuss the curriculum, visited lessons, looked at pupils' workbooks and spoke with pupils about their learning. Inspectors also examined curriculum information for a wider range of subjects.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during social times and spoke with pupils about their experiences.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, a variety of policies, information about pupils' attendance and behaviour, pupils' EHC and individual education plans and pupils' individual risk assessments.
- Inspectors took into account the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- In order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards, inspectors considered relevant documentation and reviewed facilities at the school's site.

Inspection team

Rachel Tordoff, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stephen Long

Ofsted Inspector

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