

Inspection of Pens Meadow School

Ridge Hill, Brierley Hill Road, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 5ST

Inspection dates: 26–27 November 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this school. Their individual special educational needs and/or disabilities, which are often complex, are well met. High-quality support means that the small steps pupils make are often huge achievements. Staff have a deep understanding of each pupil's specific needs. Their expectations of pupils are high, yet achievable. Pupils show eagerness to learn because activities are fun and appealing. Pupils are particularly successful in gaining functional communication skills. This helps them to succeed in tasks and grow in independence. Pupils show a genuine desire to be at school.

The level of care for pupils is exceptional. They are kept safe. They know that they have many reliable and caring adults in school to help them. Pupils behave very well and do not disrupt the learning of others. They learn the importance of controlling and taking responsibility for their actions. In the rare event that bullying occurs, staff sort it out quickly and effectively. There is an ever-present vibe of positivity that flows throughout the school. This is a really happy place for pupils. The personal care that they receive helps them to thrive and succeed.

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

The headteacher leads the school with passion and determination. She communicates clearly that children are what matter most at Pens Meadow. Everything staff do is about helping pupils to realise their potential. Staff know precisely the individualised support that each pupil requires. Teaching is personalised. This enables pupils to overcome barriers to learning and achieve well. Leaders maintain a focus on the goals set out in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. This means that teachers focus on the things that matter in order to help pupils gain independence.

The curriculum ensures that pupils access a range of worthwhile learning experiences. It provides them with the essential skills to communicate. In post-16 provision, it equips students with knowledge to help them manage beyond school. Teachers select curriculum content to reflect the interests and needs of pupils. This motivates pupils because learning is relevant and engaging. Teachers help pupils make the connection between learning and its application to the real world.

Through targeted support, teachers address gaps in pupils' understanding. Pupils and students develop their skills and knowledge well over time. They build on what they have learned before. Senior leaders take the lion's share of the work related to leading the curriculum. This means that sometimes improvement does not happen as quickly as it could. Most of the curriculum is organised well so that pupils can revisit and practise key skills, but occasionally the order of learning lacks a logical sequence. Additionally, what staff want pupils to know by the end of a series of lessons is not clearly defined.

Communication is a cornerstone of the school. It is embedded into everything that pupils do. They use symbols or signing, eye pointing and gesture to communicate feelings, choices and requests. Leaders prioritise pupils' early reading development. Where appropriate, teachers help pupils gain good phonics knowledge so that they can read independently. However, more could be done to promote reading for pleasure. Some classroom reading areas look tired and do not encourage excitement about reading.

Children in the early years enjoy the same good-quality provision as the rest of the school. Staff introduce children to a range of books. These include traditional stories like Little Red Riding Hood. Children show curiosity in tasks and enjoyment in their learning. They get involved in cultural events such as Diwali celebrations. This gives children a sense of the richness of our society. They take part in community visits where they put into practice skills learned.

Students in post-16 provision are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. They receive practical careers guidance and advice. Their weekly timetable is structured so they get a taste of the world of work. Everything is geared towards them building independence. For example, students undertake travel training. They work towards and complete practical qualifications.

There is a calm, purposeful learning environment around the school. Pupils' behaviour in classrooms is good. On arrival in the morning, staff are welcoming. They create a positive start that sets the tone for the day. Staff establish routines for pupils. This is especially helpful for children in the early years. Pupils know the rules and how to keep themselves safe in school. The family outreach team works particularly well to support pupils' personal development. Staff work effectively to maintain high levels of pupils' attendance.

Pupils learn about the importance of respecting others. In religious education, pupils find out about people who have a faith and those who do not. They experience a variety of cultural experiences. This includes outward bound residential trips and visits to the theatre. A small proportion of pupils benefit from attending the weekly after-school club.

Leaders have created a strong sense of community. There is regular sharing of information between home and school about how well pupils are getting on. Most parents value the work of the school. Governors play an active part in the life of the school. They work alongside leaders to shape the school's future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff pay close attention to pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders make sure that staff have a good knowledge of pupils' welfare. They follow up any concerns quickly. Staff's record-keeping is thorough. Leaders make sure all the right checks are done

on new staff. This helps to prevent unsuitable people from working with children. The school works in partnership with a range of other professionals and services. This helps to provide children and families with the support they need. Staff teach pupils about keeping safe through assemblies and the curriculum. For example, they learn about healthy and unhealthy relationships.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, teachers' long-term plans do not set out with sufficient clarity the knowledge pupils are expected to gain by the end of a stage. This means that there can be some variability in what content pupils cover. Also, teachers do not always think carefully enough about the order of learning. When this happens, pupils do not make the best possible progress. Leaders need to make refinements to curriculum plans to ensure the best logical sequences to learning. They need to make sure that they clearly define what they want pupils to know and do at the end of a series of lessons.
- Most curriculum development work is done by the headteacher and deputy. However, they do not have an infinite amount of capacity. There are other skilled leaders ready to take on this work. To increase the rate of positive curriculum change, senior leaders need to share the work more widely and make sure that potential subject leaders have the expertise to fulfil their roles and responsibilities successfully. At present, senior leaders are working hard to prepare new leaders for greater responsibility.
- Reading environments around school vary from class to class. Sometimes they can be quite dull and do not inspire pupils to read for pleasure. Leaders need to support teachers to improve their reading areas and make reading exciting.

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're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	103883
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10058496
Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paul Leyshon
Headteacher	Marie Hunter
Website	www.pens-meadow.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 January 2018

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple-learning difficulties. Many pupils also have an autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan. A significant number of pupils have complex needs.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school has a separate site a few miles away, where the post-16 provision is located.
- The school does not have a religious ethos.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and phase leaders. Inspectors also met with members of the governing body, including the chair. An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Curriculum areas considered as part of this inspection were communication, physical development, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and mathematics. The deep dive involved inspectors carrying out lesson visits to see these curriculum areas being taught and looking at pupils' work. Inspectors communicated with pupils about their learning. They spoke to teachers and other staff who taught these curriculum areas. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors examined the school's safeguarding arrangements by reviewing safeguarding records, checking the safety of the school site, talking to staff and pupils about how they keep safe and checking the school's record of staff appointment checks. An inspector met with the school's designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors considered 29 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to the Ofsted pupils' survey. There were 14 responses on parents' views from Ofsted Parent View and 13 free-text comments. An inspector met with a group of parents.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

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