

Inspection of an outstanding school: Meath School

Brox Road, Ottershaw, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0LF

Inspection dates:

11–12 December 2019

Outcome

Meath School continues to be an outstanding school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils like this happy, friendly school. They know that staff care deeply about them and want them 'to be the best that they can be'. Pupils feel safe at Meath. They know they can tell an adult if they have any worries or concerns. Bullying happens very rarely. If it does, adults help sort it out.

Pupils get exactly the right help to understand their emotions and describe their feelings. The same thoughtful approach is used in all classes. As a result, the school is a calm and cheerful place to learn.

Pupils told us they like doing lots of fun things with their friends at Meath. Lunchtime clubs keep pupils busy. They eagerly take part in judo sessions, join the Meath Singers, or get creative at the art club. The 'super skills' group prepares pupils for when they leave the school. Pupils excitedly explained the best way to make a bed and clean their shoes.

Leaders are determined that pupils will succeed. Work is well underway to revitalise the school's approach to pupils' learning. Some subjects are now carefully planned and organised. However, leaders know this work is not well developed.

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

The acting headteacher is skilfully leading the school through a period of change. She, along with her senior leadership team, is successfully uniting the school after a difficult few months. Leaders are bringing fresh ideas and a renewed sense of urgency to improve the school. They are passionate about their work and determined to provide the very best quality of education for pupils at Meath.

Leaders and staff have a deep understanding of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They are using their expertise in this area to sharpen up the planning

in the subjects they teach. Some subjects, such as mathematics and personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education, are well organised. Knowledge and skills are sequenced into a logical order. However, not all subjects are planned with the same careful precision. Teaching plans are not yet clear enough across all subjects to ensure pupils' learning develops sequentially and coherently.

Teachers and therapists working seamlessly together is a hallmark of this school. They are well-trained and thoughtful. They work tirelessly to give pupils the skills they need to achieve well. Most pupils develop the skills and confidence they need to make a successful transition when they leave the school.

Firm foundations for learning and communication are successfully established in the early years. Children quickly learn to sign, talk or use communication aids to express their ideas. Consequently, children are confident communicators and keen to join in.

Reading is the mainstay of the school's work. Right from the early days of joining the school, pupils are read to. Staff bring stories to life, encouraging pupils to act them out and get involved. Pupils develop a love of books. They look forward to reading to Rusty, the school's 'reading dog'. Older pupils like to visit Addlestone library to borrow books. Staff proficiently use a range of appropriate specialist techniques and approaches, including phonics, to teach reading. They expertly find the right approach for each pupil. Leaders have recognised that these various approaches are not yet described in a coherent reading programme. Well-developed plans are in place to bring together these techniques into one coherent programme so that reading and phonics are taught systematically.

The school's work to support pupils' behaviour and personal development is strong. Routines are nice and clear. Pupils' positive behaviour is noticed and rewarded. Pupils behave well, work hard and know exactly what is expected of them. They earn credits to spend in the 'Happy Shop', or proudly receive the school's trophy each week. Pupils build their confidence and social skills by regular interesting visits into the community. They visit local shops, places of worship or museums to find out more about their world.

Staff are proud to work at Meath. One member of staff expressed the views of many, describing it as 'a privilege' to work here. They feel well supported by senior leaders. Staff value the efforts that leaders make to reduce their workload and care for them. Staff are looking forward to the new well-being sessions due to start in the new year.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Knowledgeable staff understand exactly what they need to do if they are worried about a pupil. Leaders and staff are acutely aware that pupils' additional needs make them particularly vulnerable. They know the signs to look out for that might indicate a pupil is at risk of harm.

Staff work closely with pupils and their families to help keep pupils safe. They support families to tap into extra help from external agencies when needed.

Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe online. Some pupils confidently explained that they know not to accept any requests from strangers who want to be their online friends. They know not to give out personal information and how to keep passwords secure.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, such as mathematics and PSHE, knowledge and skills are coherently planned and sequenced so that pupils know more and remember more over time. However, this is not the case in all subjects, especially other foundation subjects. Leaders need to continue to improve the planning of foundation subjects so that knowledge and skills across the curriculum are coherently planned and sequenced in a logical order. It is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken to develop the curriculum further and train staff in how to deliver it, that they are in the process of bringing this about.
- Staff introduce pupils to a range of helpful and appropriate reading strategies, taking into account pupils' very specific SEND. However, currently the school does not bring these approaches together into a clearly set out programme for the teaching of reading and phonics. Leaders need to continue the positive work they have already started in order to develop a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics and reading, adapted to pupils' specific SEND.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be outstanding we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged Meath School to be outstanding on 17 February 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 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 are 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	125478
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10111400
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	64
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Bob Reitemeier (Chief executive officer, I CAN)
Principal	Pam Cosh (acting)
Website	www.meathschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 March 2016

Information about this school

- The school is part of the 'I CAN' children's communication charity.
- Meath provides for pupils with speech, language and communication needs. Some pupils also have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The deputy headteacher is currently the acting principal following the departure of the previous principal in November 2019.

Information about this inspection

- We met with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers, therapists and support staff.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and PSHE. We discussed the curriculum design with subject leaders, carried out a series of lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers about the curriculum.
- We evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. The school's single central record was reviewed. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead, scrutinised documentation, including a sample of case files, and spoke to pupils and staff.

- The lead inspector met with two governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of I CAN as well as the director of education for I CAN.
- We met with pupils to discuss their views about the school. There were 41 responses to the school's adapted version of Ofsted's pupils' survey.
- We took account of the 27 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, and 21 additional free-text responses. An inspector met with a few parents at the start of the first day of the inspection.
- We considered the views of 34 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Claire Prince, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Charles Joseph

Ofsted Inspector

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