

# Merefield School

Westminster Drive, Southport, Merseyside PR8 2QZ

## Inspection dates

4–5 June 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Outstanding</b>
Early years provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Leaders and governors are uncompromising in their drive to deliver the very best education for all pupils. They have a clear vision for the continuing improvement of the school.
- Senior and middle leaders are highly skilled. They share a determination for each pupil to succeed. They have developed a warm, purposeful learning environment. This motivates pupils to quickly engage in education.
- Leaders have devised a curriculum which is adapted to meet the individual needs of each pupil. This ensures that they develop useful skills for life.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers know the specific needs of pupils and plan extremely well to engage their interest and develop their skills. As a result, the progress that pupils make is impressive.
- Behaviour is excellent. Pupils are very respectful of each other, staff and visitors.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough and effective.
- Governors are proud and ambitious for the school. They provide strong and effective leadership. They analyse information in detail and challenge leaders effectively.
- Pupils' academic progress is closely checked. Leaders act promptly and effectively to ensure that pupils make consistently strong progress.
- The social and personal development of pupils is exceptional. Pupils are cared for very well. There is a sharp focus on improving pupils' communication skills.
- Leaders are trialling a system to measure how well pupils' self-esteem and confidence develop. This will gather evidence of progress across all aspects of a pupil's personal development in addition to their academic progress.
- The early years provision is outstanding. Children make very strong progress. Teachers and teaching assistants know the children and the curriculum exceptionally well. They create a stimulating learning environment for the children in which they can learn and play effectively.
- Students aged 16 to 19 make outstanding progress and achieve recognised accreditation. They are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage of their lives. Staff work effectively with providers to make sure students' transition is as smooth as possible.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Continue to refine the school's system for assessing pupils' progress across all aspects of their development so leaders have an accurate overview of all progress pupils are making.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- The headteacher, ably supported by senior and middle leaders, has built upon the strengths of the school since the last inspection. The headteacher's vision, determination and strong leadership have created a culture of high expectations and a drive for continual improvement.
- The school is a community in which there is strong and effective teamwork. Training and research are central to the aim of improving the outcomes for every pupil. As a result, the school has grown from strength to strength and its effectiveness has improved. Of those staff who completed the Ofsted staff survey, almost all considered the school has improved a lot since the last inspection.
- Leaders have developed an exceptionally well-planned curriculum. It provides highly individualised, personalised programmes of study, across all year groups. A mixture of research-based school improvement work and activities with other schools has given leaders a clear understanding of what pupils need to know and do. The curriculum and provision are then moulded to help pupils achieve extremely well.
- Relationships between everyone are excellent and staff morale is high. This contributes greatly to the outstanding progress pupils make. Adults try to encourage each pupil to achieve that little bit more and then celebrate with them when they do.
- Professional development is highly effective at all levels. Staff benefit from internal and external training that improves provision across the school. There are clear processes in place to develop staff as leaders at all levels.
- Funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to support and accelerate their learning and improve their well-being. This ensures that disadvantaged pupils of all abilities and needs are supported to make the best progress possible.
- In key stages 1 and 2, the physical education (PE) and sport funding is used effectively to offer a broader range of sporting activities for pupils. This increases their skills and enables them to experience competitive sport. As a result, pupils develop increased confidence and self-esteem.
- The Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium has been used effectively to support identified pupils through the use of targeted interventions and resources. This has resulted in those pupils making more rapid progress in literacy and numeracy.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and for promoting fundamental British values is appropriate to pupils' needs. Evidence in displays, teachers' plans and pupils' work shows this aspect of the curriculum is very effective. Overall, pupils are very well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- The local authority provides effective support. Recently, this particularly helped governors when they were seeking to appoint a new headteacher.
- Parents and carers strongly support the school. They have confidence in the leadership of the headteacher and the work of the staff team. The vast majority of parents who completed Parent View, and those who spoke with inspectors, strongly support the

school. Parents felt the school is a welcoming place, and if they have a concern their views are listened to and acted upon.

- Parents commented positively on the quality of information they receive about their child's progress and value the weekly newsletter. This gives each family weekly information about the work their child has completed. The recently introduced online communication system has been warmly received by parents. The quick, easy communication between teaching staff and parents is very much appreciated.

### **Governance of the school**

- The governing body is totally committed to providing an excellent quality of education. Governors take pride in the school and provide excellent support to leaders and staff.
- Governors have an in-depth and detailed knowledge of the school. They bring a wealth of different skills and valuable experiences to their roles. They have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness.
- Governors support and challenge leaders well. They visit the school regularly, speak with pupils about their experience and listen to leaders' priorities. They reflect on their own effectiveness and seek training and guidance when needed.
- Under the skilful leadership of the experienced and dedicated chair of the governing body, governors have reviewed their skills and appointed new members to ensure they continue to be well placed to support and challenge the work of senior leaders.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Checks regarding the suitability of staff are rigorous. The school maintains an accurate single central record.
- Leaders ensure that staff are up to date with the latest safeguarding advice. All staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding.
- Through the curriculum, leaders make sure pupils have frequent opportunities to learn about their own well-being and safety and how to manage risks. This helps them to keep safe.
- Leaders ensure that policy and practice are rigorous, including risk assessments, to keep pupils safe when taking part in a wide range of outdoor and off-site activities.
- Parents who spoke with inspectors, and others who responded to the online survey and the school's own questionnaire, agree their children are safe.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

### **Outstanding**

- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Staff have extremely high expectations for each individual pupil at their particular stage of development. High-quality teaching across the whole school leads to all pupils being well prepared for their next steps in education and life beyond school.
- Staff are accomplished in meeting the needs of pupils in their care. The relentless focus on meeting pupils' individual needs is evident across the school. The school's emphasis

on providing an individual approach to learning enables pupils of all ages and abilities to become successful learners.

- Teachers and all other adults build strong relationships with pupils. They have a thorough and detailed understanding of pupils' specific needs. Targets are closely linked to pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Staff record each small step in learning and share these with parents. Teachers' plans are meticulous in taking into account pupils' previous learning. As a result, pupils' progress is outstanding.
- A major strength in teaching is the development of pupils' communication skills, which underpins all learning. Adults develop and reinforce these skills through a finely tuned programme. This runs through all subject areas and across the whole school.
- Teachers assess what pupils know and can do with precision and clarity. The development in pupils' work over time provides compelling evidence of the significant academic progress pupils make.
- Teachers and teaching assistants check their assessments within phases, across the school and with other schools, which ensures they are accurate and reliable.
- On the few occasions when pupils do not make expected progress, leaders quickly identify this through their regular checks on the quality of teaching and learning and the detailed analysis of pupils' progress. Leaders intervene promptly. They provide effective support to ensure that learning outcomes are closely matched to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils quickly get back on track and achieve expected outcomes.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The culture and ethos within the school is to treat each pupil as an individual. This very strongly supports pupils' emotional development. Teachers' planning, including the pupils' targets, addresses every aspect of the pupils' needs, including their personal development and welfare. Staff know what pupils can do now and what can be expected of them in the future.
- Leaders are developing an assessment system to accurately record the development of pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Currently this system is not fully refined.
- Pupils settle into the school day quickly because of the excellent quality of care and support they receive. They thrive on the encouragement they receive and display excellent attitudes to learning.
- Pupils take part in a range of off-site activities. This starts with the youngest pupils and continues through to the oldest, with increasing levels of independence. Activities such as shopping, handling money, working with local charities and visits to local community resources help pupils to develop useful skills for later life.
- Staff work closely with parents when pupils enter or leave the school. Parents say nothing is too much trouble for staff and they are grateful for the support they are given during what is an anxious time for them. As a result, their children settle well into the school and they are supported when transferring to a different setting.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the site is exemplary. Pupils are considerate, courteous and respectful towards adults and each other. They respond quickly to established routines. Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons. This is because they have a clear understanding of the behaviour required to learn well. As a result, pupils concentrate fully during lessons and no learning time is wasted.
- Staff provide excellent support for pupils who have exhibited challenging behaviour in the past. Staff are highly skilled in de-escalating situations. Their detailed knowledge of pupils' needs enables them to use appropriate strategies to refocus pupils on learning. Staff build caring and respectful relationships. This underpins the school's approach to managing pupils' behaviour.
- Overall attendance is below the national average for similar schools. This is caused by pupils whose absences are attributable to their acute medical conditions. Leaders have effective systems in place to ensure the safety of these pupils.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Outstanding

- Pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points. This is because the curriculum is so well adapted to pupils' needs. The work in each lesson is meticulously planned. This is to ensure that pupils have exactly the right level of challenge to challenge them. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress in developing their skills in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Inspectors cross-referenced pupils' progress against the targets in their EHC plans. Inspection evidence shows pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Pupils' excellent progress from their starting points helps many to lead more complete lives. This may mean being able to read aloud, to express choices and preferences, to develop independent reading skills, or to be able to walk using support. All achieve exceptionally well.
- The personalised learning intention map (PLIM) is highly effective in identifying pupils' specific emotional or learning needs and addressing them through carefully planned teaching. As a result, pupils are more able to focus on developing the skills and knowledge needed to prepare them for the next stage of their lives.
- Leaders' close monitoring helps them to continually review and redraft pupils' targets to reflect the substantial gains that they make in their learning and personal, social and physical development.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is in line with all other pupils with the same starting points in the school.

## Early years provision

## Outstanding

- Children in the early years make outstanding progress. Their development in learning, physical development and communication skills are all excellent. This is a result of consistent use of very well-chosen resources and methods to stimulate their learning. These include objects of reference, symbols and signing.
- Teachers and the other adults have a deep understanding of the requirements of the early years and the needs of each child. This enables them to provide a creative and stimulating learning environment. Indoor and outdoor spaces provide a safe, stimulating environment. This encourages children to learn. Well-planned visits into the local community help children develop their social skills and grow in confidence. Children are safe and well cared for because teachers plan meticulously for these valuable activities.
- Teachers plan to meet the individual needs of children. All adults are clear about what children need to learn next and what their part is in that learning. Teachers and teaching assistants annotate the plans with their observations and assessments of children's learning. This results in accurate records of the children's learning journeys.
- Teachers and teaching assistants check frequently their assessments of children with colleagues and moderate them more widely in school. Assessments are also moderated with other schools and by the local authority.
- Safeguarding procedures are highly effective. Children are kept safe in a calm and welcoming environment with opportunities to play indoors and outside. Outstanding leadership ensures that staff are trained well in how to care for and keep children safe. As a result, children's welfare and safety needs are met sensitively by a team of caring adults and children's behaviour is excellent.
- Staff establish routines quickly. This enables children to move smoothly into their new environment. As a result, they start to develop effectively their communication and physical skills.
- Assessment information shows disadvantaged children achieve as well as their peers. All groups of children have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- Communication between staff and parents is effective. Parents contribute to initial assessments and visit the school to see the progress their child is making.

## 16 to 19 study programmes

## Outstanding

- The quality of education for students aged 16 to 19 is outstanding. Students follow a curriculum which is highly individualised and well suited to their needs.
- Leaders are committed to providing the very best opportunities for students in the sixth form. Leaders have a strong focus on maximising students' preparedness for the next steps in their lives.
- Students' behaviour is excellent. Students are extremely supportive and respectful of each other.

- Leaders ensure that students' transition from sixth form is carefully managed. Leaders carefully monitor how well students settle over time in their target destination.
- Students benefit from enrichment activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. These help to develop students' confidence and self-esteem. Students also have opportunities to support younger pupils in school. This further develops their self-confidence.
- Staff have high ambitions for students. They know their individual needs well and plan lessons that inspire and engage them. They know how to get the very best out of them, both academically and socially. As a result, students make strong gains in their development.
- Leadership of the provision is outstanding. The safeguarding and well-being of students are always key priorities. Staff encourage students to become independent and open up opportunities for them with regard to future destinations and adulthood.
- Students are exceptionally well prepared for adulthood. Students receive high-quality careers advice and guidance and support to make appropriate choices, and parents are involved in this process.

## School details

Unique reference number	104979
Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	10094509

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brenda Porter
Headteacher	Sue Clare
Telephone number	01704 577 163
Website	<a href="http://www.merefieldschool.co.uk">www.merefieldschool.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@merefieldschool.co.uk">head@merefieldschool.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2018

## Information about this school

- Merefield School is a maintained special school for pupils aged two to 19 years with severe, profound, multiple and complex learning difficulties, and autism spectrum disorders.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. At the time of the inspection, the youngest child was four years old.
- Pupils are organised into class groups based on their area of primary need and compatibility with their peers.
- The school does not place any pupils in alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors scrutinised the school's records of checks on pupils' personal development and progress and a wide range of other documents, including the school's arrangements to safeguard pupils, the school's own self-evaluation documents and its plans for further development.
- Inspectors visited classes, observed learning and considered a wide range of pupils' books and other evidence of their learning, such as their learning journals and displays.
- Meetings were held with school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents and governors.
- Inspectors considered parents' views, including 19 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the 24 responses to the Ofsted online staff survey.
- The lead inspector spoke with the local authority representative.

## Inspection team

Mark Burgess, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Bernard Robinson

Ofsted Inspector

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