

The Mendip School

Edmund Rack Road, Prestleigh, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 4FZ

Inspection dates

12–13 July 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This increasingly sought-after school has gone from strength to strength since opening three years ago. The experienced and ambitious leaders, supported by skilled governors and trustees, are determined to secure excellence for pupils.
- Staff feel well supported and are proud to work at the school. Morale is high. Staff understand pupils' needs. They adapt their teaching strategies effectively to match the emotional challenges faced by pupils.
- Pupils benefit from a cleverly designed building that supports flexible learning both inside and outside. The rich curriculum provides a relevant, interesting learning diet that weaves in therapy and real-life experiences.
- The good-quality teaching across the school supports pupils to achieve good outcomes. Pupils' books show that their skills develop well over time in mathematics, science and in writing.
- Leaders have developed a comprehensive assessment system. It enables teachers to plan lessons that support pupils' next steps. Leaders have correctly identified that the system requires further refinement to ensure that evaluations of progress are accurate.
- Pupils enjoy an unusually wide range of activities, although there is little evaluation of the impact of these activities on outcomes for pupils.
- Lessons have clear learning objectives, which are set out for pupils to see. Therefore, pupils usually understand what they are learning and why. Pupils are less clear, however, about their own personal goals.
- Pupils feel safe and are safe at school. There is a calm and orderly atmosphere supported by magical touches, such as a placid therapy dog who offers a friendly ear when needed.
- At times of stress, a few pupils choose to remove themselves from their learning and visit quiet spaces around school. This supports some pupils well and reduces serious behaviour incidents. However, there are inconsistencies in the recording and analysis of time spent in these areas and of behaviour incidents.
- Pupils often arrive with deep-seated anxieties to overcome before they can attend school regularly. Leaders have good strategies in place to support families and pupils.
- However, attendance remains low for some pupils. Attendance analysis is not clear. This reduces governors' ability to challenge and question leaders about attendance.
- Some risk assessments lack detail to ensure that they take full account of the risks presented to pupils, particularly while on trips and activities outside school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers need to ensure that:
 - the assessment system continues to be developed so that it provides an accurate picture of the progress that pupils make over time and ensures that pupils, as appropriate to their needs, understand their next steps
 - governors receive analysis of pupils' attendance and behaviour and this demonstrates improvements over time
 - risk assessments, such as those for activities out of school, closely match the identified risks and agreed strategies for individual pupils
 - the impact of the physical education (PE) and sport premium on outcomes for pupils is clear.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders are highly ambitious for pupils at the school. They create a supportive, outward-looking learning environment where staff are trusted to try out new approaches. A strength is the quality of local networks to which the school belongs, which encourage staff to be inquisitive and to question what they do. Good communication across teams enables staff to evaluate what has worked well.
- Leaders pay close attention to strengths and areas that need further development. They target areas for professional development to ensure that the school is continually learning and improving. Staff, including those new to teaching, report that they are well supported and mentored.
- A strong sense of inclusion and respect for others, whatever their culture or belief may be, shines through. Pupils feel secure and well looked after. Staff work hard at developing pupils' empathy and tolerance. They recognise pupils' achievements and ensure that these are celebrated. As a result, pupils develop self-confidence and an appreciation of others. This helps to prepare them well for their futures.
- The curriculum is personalised and aims to create an educational experience that prepares pupils for adult life. The on-site café is an example of the leaders' vision to create opportunities for pupils to experience real-life work situations.
- The pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up additional funding provides therapeutic approaches, additional literacy and numeracy, and professional development for staff. Leaders check the impact of this spending on outcomes for pupils and can demonstrate that disadvantaged pupils perform as well as others at the school.
- The PE and sport premium secures a wide range of extra sporting and adventure activities, such as fishing, table tennis, special playground activities, the Mendip Mile, and caving. There is less detail available about the impact that these extra physical activities have on outcomes for pupils.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a wide and suitable range of experiences and skills, which they use to support leaders. Governors are involved in the school and know it well. Each governor leads on a priority in the school development plan. They use this as a focus for visits to the school. They are passionate about ensuring that the school continues to grow and develop further.
- In reports to governors, some key school improvement actions, for example to do with attendance, behaviour and the use of additional funding for PE and sport, do not provide detailed analysis and evaluation. This reduces the level of challenge that governors can provide to leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff know pupils well and often strike up supportive communication with parents and carers. This helps to keep pupils safe. Concerns are discussed, and leaders act to seek advice and involve other agencies if needed.
- Leaders ensure that staff have appropriate safeguarding training which covers a wide range of topics, including child sexual exploitation and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated lead for safeguarding also attends safeguarding updates and then ensures that staff hear any new or updated information at staff meetings. Recruitment arrangements are secure. All required checks are completed. A red badge system alerts staff and pupils to visitors.
- Staff are aware of risks to pupils and strategies that help to keep them safe. However, some risk assessments, for example those for activities and trips, are not sufficiently detailed. As a result, key strategies to help keep pupils safe while out of school may be missed.
- Pupils say that they know who they can talk to if they have any concerns, and this helps them to feel secure in school. Due to the frequent reminders from staff, they understand how to keep themselves safe while online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- A strength of the good-quality teaching and learning across the school is the variety of approaches that staff use to support pupils' behavioural, emotional and social needs. Staff have a toolbox of strategies, selecting the most appropriate 'tool' at any time to ensure that pupils can make progress and move forward.
- At times, learning involves working in teams to solve a problem. As a result, pupils develop stronger communication skills. They learn to listen to one another's views and ideas. Other lessons involve learning to keep their attention and focus for longer. Staff use a variety of sounds and visual surprises to maintain pupils' interests. As a result, many pupils develop their ability to listen, to focus and to help each other. These skills prepare them well for functional lessons in mathematics, reading, writing and science. Pupils also enjoy practical learning, such as caring for the school's hens.
- Leaders have been quick to research a range of teaching resources and strategies to ensure that the best possible are available to pupils at The Mendip School. A different approach to the teaching of phonics, for example, which has a predictable pattern to the sequence of each lesson, suits pupils' needs well.
- Teachers adapt the school's curriculum plans using the assessment information provided by the school's 'evidence for learning' information. This precisely identifies the areas of the curriculum appropriate for each pupil. Teachers are clear about exactly what they are teaching and how the lesson fits into a series of lessons.
- As a result, learning activities very often match the learning needs of pupils. Most pupils therefore focus well on their learning activities. Pupils are less clear about their overall personal goals as described in their education, health and care plans and how well they are achieving these or what their next steps should be.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum includes themes such as personal safety in the wider world and staying safe using social media.
- A wide range of activities supports pupils' physical health. Pupils are encouraged to explore different sports and then to pursue a sport if it interests them. Pupils can join teams, such as the football team, and take part in physical challenges, such as the Mendip Mile.
- Many pupils have, in previous settings, been individually supported by a teaching assistant. Here, pupils learn alongside their peers, in small groups. There is a deliberate aim to support pupils to learn and work alongside others. This prepares pupils well for future learning or employment.
- Pupils say that there are occasions when pupils are unkind to one another, but they report that staff notice this very quickly and make sure that it stops.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Leaders demonstrate high expectations of behaviour. Staff welcome pupils with a calm, positive manner and this approach continues throughout the day. They communicate effectively with pupils, for example using signing, visual reminders or specific key words that pupils understand. As a result, pupils learn to manage their behaviour well. Most parents who expressed a view said that they were happy with how the school manages behaviour.
- When there are disruptions to learning due to behaviour incidents, some pupils regulate their behaviour by moving to a quiet space. Although staff record these events, the records are inconsistent. Therefore, leaders are not able to track and analyse the effectiveness of this strategy on individuals or to look for patterns of usage.
- Leaders have prioritised attendance as an area for improvement this year. A significant number of pupils have specific medical or emotional needs and do not attend school regularly. Many of these pupils are new to the school. Leaders are working to form strong partnerships with families so that they can understand any specific needs and gain appropriate support. Leaders can show improvement in attendance for some pupils, although there is less analysis of the impact of their strategies on pupils' attendance over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils are good. On arrival, pupils are assessed to establish what they know, can do and understand. Teachers use this information to plan a personalised pathway using the school's 'evidence for learning' curriculum and assessment strategy. This enables teachers to ensure that pupils receive good coverage of the curriculum and the small steps support teachers to plan different learning activities, depending on

the learning needs of pupils.

- As a result, pupils acquire new knowledge and skills, particularly in writing, mathematics and science, as they develop through the school. Pupils' books show that expectations in subjects such as history and geography are not consistently quite as high.
- Pupils' books also show that pupils who do not attend regularly do not make as strong progress as their regularly attending peers. However, the school's assessment information describes these pupils' progress as very good. Leaders are aware that the assessment system needs further development to ensure that it accurately describes the progress that pupils make from their starting points.
- Leaders are developing the range of accredited courses that are available to pupils. Many study entry-level qualifications in English, mathematics or science. Several pupils in key stage 4 take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. This supports pupils' resilience and independence and prepares them well for their next steps in education, training or employment.
- Leaders successfully use their partnerships with other schools to provide careers guidance to pupils and to provide alternative courses and work experience placements for older pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	142118
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10048383

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	85
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Hilary Macaulay
Executive principal	Emily Massey
Telephone number	01749 838040
Website	www.themendipschool.co.uk
Email address	office@themendipschool.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Mendip School opened as a free school in September 2015. It opened using temporary accommodation and moved to the permanent site in Shepton Mallet in September 2016. It is part of The Partnership Trust, made up of eight schools, including a national support and teaching school.
- A board of trustees delegates responsibility for the management of the school to a local governing body. The executive principal is also principal at a nearby special school within the same trust, Fosse Way School. A head of school manages The Mendip School on a day-to-day basis.
- The school aims to cater for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication needs.
- The school currently has too few pupils in the early years and the sixth form to form part of this report. Students who are currently in the sixth form mainly receive their education at Fosse Way special school.

- The school has used an alternative provider called Reach, which is based in Martock in Somerset.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons with senior leaders and scrutinised pupils' workbooks. Several meetings took place with leaders, including the leaders for English, mathematics and science. A meeting took place with newly qualified teachers.
- Several school documents were scrutinised, including the school's evaluation of its effectiveness, the school improvement plan and information about the progress that pupils are making. School policies and documents related to safeguarding, attendance and behaviour were considered. The school's recruitment procedures were checked.
- A meeting was held with two governors and the chair of the governing body. A telephone conversation took place with the chief education officer of the trust. A further telephone conversation took place with a representative from Somerset local authority.
- Inspectors talked with pupils informally and met with several parents to gather their views. The 31 responses, including the free-text responses, to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The 33 responses to an online survey for staff were also considered.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Mascal

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