

Woodlawn School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108652
Local Authority	North Tyneside
Inspection number	356402
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	John Farrow

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Claire McCann
Headteacher	Mrs Val Brown
Date of previous school inspection	11 December 2007
School address	Langley Avenue West Monkseaton, Whitley Bay Tyne and Wear NE25 9DF
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. 13 lessons were observed, involving 11 teachers. Meetings were held with members of staff, members of the governing body and three parents/carers. Telephone interviews were also conducted with two representatives of external partners. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including that relating to safeguarding of pupils, teachers' planning and pupils' progress. Fifty-six parents' and carers' questionnaires were also scrutinised.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How well the school's assessment arrangements are supporting the learning of pupils of differing abilities.
- How well pupils' communication, interaction, personal and social skills (especially behaviour) are promoted by staff.
- How well the school's specialist status partnership activities contribute to the learning outcomes of its pupils.

Information about the school

Woodlawn is an all-age school for pupils with broad range of severe or complex special educational needs. Pupils can enter the school at any time of the school year following the outcomes of the statutory assessment process for pupils with special educational needs. Very young children often enter the assessment unit within the Early Years Foundation Stage as part of these assessment processes. They can remain at this school, or move on to other schools, once this assessment is complete. Many of the older pupils are admitted later, with autistic spectrum type difficulties or mental health problems. These admission patterns mean numbers can fluctuate, but the school is of average size compared to similar schools of this type. Pupils are drawn mainly from across North Tyneside local authority, although small numbers may also come from neighbouring local authorities; almost all are of predominantly White British heritage. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is just over twice the national average. There are marginally more boys than girls, with a very small number of children looked after by the local authority. The school was designated as a specialist special school for communication and interaction in September 2009; at the same time, it established new sixth form provision. The school holds a number of nationally recognised awards including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, ICT quality Mark (Consultancy School), Sports Mark, Activemark, International Schools (Intermediate) and has Healthy School Status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Woodlawn is a good school. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support and an outstanding curriculum that provides highly relevant, varied and memorable learning experiences that enable the pupils to thrive. Consequently, the pupils achieve well, make good progress, feel extremely safe and learn to behave in an exemplary manner. The Early Years Foundation Stage is highly effective and achieves outstanding outcomes by recognising the uniqueness of each child and meeting their individual needs exceptionally well. Almost all parents and carers responses to the questionnaire strongly endorse the school's work and the impact it has on their children's learning and development. One comment was typical of many when it said, 'The staff are fantastic. They are supportive, positive and very hard working. They create a great learning environment and care for every pupil'.

The school's leaders and managers are not only highly committed to working closely with parents and carers, but also to establishing and maintaining purposeful partnerships with other organisations and providers. As a result, the school has established a well-deserved reputation as 'an outward looking centre of excellence', particularly in its use of high-quality information communication technology (ICT) that makes a very effective contribution to the pupils' good progress and well-being. In September 2009, this established strength helped the school to gain specialist special school status for communication and interaction. At the same time, the school leaders introduced and developed a new sixth form successfully. The sixth form has already become well established; students now have access to a wider range of more appropriate curricular programmes. However, currently the progress of these older students is assessed largely in relation to the courses they follow. The leaders are aware that more needs to be done to ensure other aspects of their performance and development are assessed in an equally consistent and reliable manner as in the rest of the school.

The school's leaders and managers at all levels are never complacent and remain suitably ambitious and determined to secure further improvements wherever possible. They have successfully demonstrated this while consolidating and improving their use of assessment procedures, an area for improvement identified at the last inspection. This improvement has been achieved well, so that the teachers and other adults are now planning much more effectively to meet the individual needs of all pupils. The leaders, managers and the governing body continue to evaluate the school's effectiveness with rigour and, as a result, take concerted action when tackling areas of weakness they have identified. For example, despite the establishment of good assessment arrangements, the school acknowledges it still needs to use national comparative data more effectively to ensure that pupils' individual targets really are as challenging as possible. Consequently, the school has established a good capacity to improve further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by making more effective use of the comparative data available to ensure that targets set for pupils are as challenging as possible.
 - Improve assessment in the sixth form by ensuring it captures each step in students' learning and personal development, to give them and their teachers a clearer view of their progress and achievement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

The pupils achieve well in lessons, where their outstanding behaviour and ability to sustain their concentration for long periods make a significant contribution to their good progress. The pupils are proud to be members of this vibrant school community and enjoy coming to a school where they are keen to achieve their best. They show high levels of enthusiasm from the moment they arrive and these positive attitudes are maintained throughout the day and carried forward into virtually all of their lessons. For example, in one outstanding media lesson, a group of older pupils worked independently, demonstrating enthusiasm while successfully directing and filming images of their peers' performances for later use in a multi-media presentation. In all of the lessons seen, the pupils showed very considerate and patient behaviour towards each other and joined in eagerly with any opportunity to praise or share in each other's successes.

Many of the youngest children start school with skills that are much lower than those expected for their age. Other pupils enter school at different ages and with widely differing abilities and experiences. Regardless of these diverse starting points, most pupils achieve or exceed their individual learning targets and make good progress in relation to their individual starting points, especially in terms of developing their ability to work, interact and communicate independently. Analysis of their subsequent progress using external value added measures confirms that there is no difference between the achievements of pupils from different groups. The pupils sustained progress, when considered alongside their growing independence and confidence applying their basic skills in new or unfamiliar situations, makes a good contribution to the workplace and other skills that they will need for life beyond school.

Attendance is broadly average with a small minority of pupils being unavoidably absent due to serious long-term medical conditions or entrenched mental health difficulties. When pupils are likely to be absent for a prolonged period of time, the school maintains regular contact with each family and medical professionals as appropriate and makes any necessary adjustments to its routines to allow pupils to return to school as soon as they are well enough.

The pupils say they feel very safe at this school and parents and carers views affirm this view strongly. They also know they are being well supported to develop responsible attitudes and a good understanding about what can constitute an unsafe situation. For example, understanding the risks associated with the use of new technology, involving social networking and the internet. The pupils show a strong sense of right and wrong also and a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Most older pupils know about the importance of a balanced diet or the need for regular exercise and most actively seek to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

The teaching is rarely less than good and is sometimes outstanding. The teachers and teaching assistants know the pupils well and use accurate and detailed knowledge of the pupils' individual needs effectively to ensure that the pupils remain well motivated and engaged most of the time. In the very best lessons, the teachers use their impressive specialist knowledge effortlessly to encourage the pupils to have fun and take risks with their learning. The teachers make effective use routinely of communication aids and other forms of technology designed to promote independent learning, communication and interaction. Some of this work is at the forefront of empowering pupils with limited communication skills to determine or influence the direction of their own learning. Assessment is good overall, observations and questioning are used skilfully to guide the pupils towards their individual, intended learning targets. The school is now using these assessment outcomes more systematically to build up a detailed picture of each pupil's current attainment and to help set future targets. It is now well placed to improve these evolving target setting arrangements further by combining established approaches with national progression guidance designed to ensure that such individual targets are truly as ambitious as possible.

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The curriculum provides the pupils with memorable experiences and rich opportunities to learn and develop as well-rounded and confident young people. Pupils' at all key stages have access to appropriate learning pathways that are broad and balanced and the school's specialist status is having a clear impact on raising achievement across the school. The school is at the forefront of the use of innovative technology to augment learning, communication and interaction for the pupils in this school and beyond. As a result, learning programmes are kept under regular review to ensure they remain highly individualised and very well matched to the changing needs of individuals and groups.

The school has created a secure yet aspirational atmosphere that supports the learning, enjoyment and personal development of all pupils very well. These aspects of the school's work ensure that the pupils make the best of the opportunities provided by the school despite their learning difficulties, medical conditions or fragmented patterns of previous education. It is evident in all aspects of the school's work on site, with other schools and agencies and with the pupils' families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school leaders and managers, other members of staff and the governing body are all equally ambitious for the pupils. They are succeeding in their determination to secure consistent high-quality provision and improving outcomes for them. As a result of purposeful and successful actions taken since the previous inspection, the teachers' use of assessment to support learning has improved significantly, while the morale and commitment of the staff have been revitalised. This action has helped to ensure that the teachers pay close attention to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. The progress of different groups is monitored carefully and shows no obvious or inexplicable differences. Target setting and tracking arrangements are developing well, but the school is aware it needs to make more effective use of the national comparative data now available to help ensure that such targets are as ambitious as possible.

The governing body is making an effective contribution in setting the direction of the school's development. It acts effectively to hold the school to account for its work, about which it has insightful first-hand knowledge. It discharges its statutory responsibilities conscientiously, for example, ensuring that safeguarding is addressed with rigour and statutory requirements are fully met. The school leaders consider the safety of the staff and pupils at all times, while careful and effective risk assessments help keep likelihood of accidents to a minimum.

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Partnerships and the school's engagement with parents and carers, other local schools and health service professionals are all outstanding. Together, they make a major contribution to the pupils' learning and well-being, as evidenced, for example, in the way the schools' specialist role promotes communication and interaction in Woodlawn and beyond. The staff acts as an essential conduit for managing much of the communication and 'joining up' the work of external agencies around the complex needs of the children and their families. This coordination helps the school to work as a cohesive community, but the senior leaders take their duty to promote wider aspects of community cohesion seriously also. The school has undertaken a rigorous audit of its own context and arrangements to evaluate the impact of its work are embedded within its school improvement plans. For example, well-advanced plans are in place to promote engagement with other schools containing a range of community groups not normally represented in its immediate community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

The Early Years Foundation Stage provides an exciting, vibrant and happy learning atmosphere. Children settle quickly because they are exceptionally well looked after within a learning environment that is wholly geared towards their individual needs. They learn quickly to become as independent as possible, behaving well as lively spirited children should. They make at least good and frequently excellent progress consistently in all areas of learning because of the combination of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, delivered alongside the high quality of support that each child receives from other adults and school-based therapists. The staff is highly skilled in the use of an effective range of communication strategies, such as signing or the use of symbols to encourage children to begin to understand language and begin to interact. Parents and carers spoken to during the inspection were particularly keen to emphasise the difference this was making to their

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children's progress and well-being. The children develop an understanding of daily routines quickly because of the consistent approach staff adopt when teaching individuals and groups to follow simple rules, to share and to obey hygiene and safety rules.

Assessment is detailed, based on sharply focused observation techniques, and is used very well to match children's learning tasks precisely to their individual needs. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively to provide a wide range of stimulating learning opportunities, based firmly on the Early Years Foundation Stage programmes of study. These opportunities challenge the children successfully to sustain their interest, while making real choices in the pursuit of their particular learning objectives. This was clearly evident, for example, in the balance being achieved between teacher-led and child-initiated activity and the free-flow of children between inside and outdoor spaces. Relationships are very secure and reverberate through the fun and laughter the children share with each other and the staff.

The leadership within the unit is excellent and draws on a secure understanding of the individual needs of the learners, alongside knowledge of how to implement the principles that underpin effective learning throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage creatively. Links with parents and carers are also excellent, with parents and carers reporting that they are extremely pleased with the help, support and advice they receive from the staff on a wide range of matters.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

The students make good progress and take responsibility readily for their own well-being and that of others. They have access to an appropriate, highly personalised range of accredited courses, some of which are delivered in partner schools and organisations. The students often show impressive reflective insights into their own progress and development and many are finding the courage to take risks with the learning pathways they follow and the choices they make. Some aspects of their personal development, such as their positive behaviour in lessons and their strong contribution to their school community are outstanding. This is because teaching and the care, guidance and support they receive are effective and build steadily on each student's aspirations and prior attainment. The opportunities provided by this increasingly dynamic and flexible post-16 curriculum are enabling the students to consolidate their basic skills, pursue high-status external qualifications and continue to develop their interpersonal and life skills well. Much has been achieved in a short space of time, but the assessment of students' performance in the sixth form lags behind that established in the rest of the school. It has become

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overly dependent on the assessment criteria of the courses being followed and more needs to be done to ensure that the students receive constructive feedback on other aspects of their progress and development and how they might improve further. This is already recognised by the sixth form leaders and managers and their planning is now focussed on tackling this area of weakness. However, the early success of the sixth form is firmly underpinned by the ambition and high expectations of its leadership and, as in the rest of the school, is driven by a strong commitment to achieve even more.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A very high proportion of parents or carers returned questionnaires. Those who did were overwhelmingly supportive of the school's provision and the outcomes it achieves. Almost all responses were positive, with most expressing strong agreement with almost every aspect of the questionnaire. Safeguarding and promoting pupils' safety featured particularly strongly. One comment that was typical of many others simply said, 'This is an amazing school with excellent staff. We can see great changes in our son each day.' A small number of responses were less positive and in particular, these returns reported that parents and carers were not kept well informed about their children's progress, which they felt was insufficient. These concerns were followed up by an inspector who held additional discussions with individual parents and carers, who he met in school on the second day of the inspection. All those spoken to said they remained completely satisfied with both the quality of information provided and the progress they were able to see in their children's development. The inspectors concluded that relationships with parents and carers were overwhelmingly constructive and endorsed the positive views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Woodlawn School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 56 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 77 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	70	13	23	2	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	51	89	6	11	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	43	75	11	19	3	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	41	72	12	21	3	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	49	86	6	11	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	77	11	19	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	63	20	35	1	2	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	34	60	17	30	1	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	42	74	12	21	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	65	17	30	1	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	42	74	13	23	2	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	81	10	18	0	0	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	47	82	9	16	1	2	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



19 November 2010

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Woodlawn School, Whitley Bay, NE25 9DF

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school.

This is what we found out.

- Your school gives you a good education and is helping you to learn well and to develop into confident young people; we understand why you are proud to go there.
- You feel safe and happy because of the exciting opportunities you have to learn and develop new skills and also because of the outstanding care and support you get from both adults and other children and young people.
- Your teachers and teaching assistants do a good job so that you enjoy your lessons and make good progress.
- The school makes particularly good use of modern technology, such as computers and communication aids, and is helping you understand how to keep yourselves safe when you use these to contact other people on the internet.
- You play your part making Woodlawn a good school by behaving very well and working hard.
- The headteacher and those who work with her to lead the school also work really hard to give you the best education they can.

We have asked the school to make sure they use all the data they can to check that the targets they set for you are at the higher levels that they think you can achieve. We have also asked them to make sure the older students in the sixth form have their progress assessed more regularly so that they can be kept better informed about their progress and what else they can do to make even better progress.

Yours sincerely,

Mr John Farrow

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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