

Woodcroft School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Woodcroft School is a multiracial special school in Loughton, Essex. It opened in 1963 and is privately owned. It is registered to admit pupils aged between two and 11 years, however, no two year olds have been admitted in the past decade. Currently there are 37 pupils on roll aged between three and 11 years. All pupils except one attend full time. No children are in receipt of government nursery funding. Most pupils have had a disrupted education which has had an adverse impact on their educational performance. All have a statement of special educational needs related to their complex learning difficulties, including autism and challenging behaviour. All pupils are referred, and are funded, by local authorities in and around London. The school was last inspected in March 2009.

The school aims to provide a safe and supportive environment within which pupils can develop to their full potential and live healthy, satisfying lives within society.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality of education and successfully meets its aims. Effective teaching, good multi-disciplinary work and a bespoke curriculum enable pupils to make good progress over time. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Welfare, health and safety procedures, including safeguarding arrangements are also outstanding. The school has maintained the overall quality of education since its last inspection and has effectively addressed the areas for further improvement identified in the last inspection report. The school continues to meet all regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. Provision covers all of the required areas of learning and it ensures all Early Years Foundation Stage learning and welfare requirements are met. In the early years a good balance is achieved between indoor and outdoor learning and the provision enables good outcomes. Comprehensive schemes of work exist for all subjects and they are implemented effectively. They are supplemented by good quality behaviour support, care and individual education plans that are linked to the specific objectives outlined in pupils' statements of special educational needs. This

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

ensures that the education provided fulfils the requirements of their statements and the curriculum is suitably matched to pupils' capabilities.

Given that pupils have complex learning difficulties, the learning programmes are highly individualised. Improving pupils' behaviour, basic skills and self-worth are at the heart of the curriculum and the methods used are successful in bringing about good gains in pupils' learning and rapid improvement in their behaviour. A variety of technological aids are used to facilitate learning and individuals have specific aids which they use effectively to access the curriculum. Information and communication technology is used satisfactorily to support learning in a range of subjects.

A comprehensive personal, social and health education programme supports pupils' personal development very well. Provision ensures that pupils are being effectively prepared for the next stage of their education. A wide range of worthwhile trips and visits are provided to broaden pupils' horizons. There are plenty of opportunities for pupils to participate in physical activity, for example, through swimming, walks in the forest and pony riding.

Teaching and assessment are good. As a result, pupils made good progress both academically, and in their personal development. In the early years there is a suitable mix between adult-led activities and those chosen by the children themselves. The children enjoy the learning activities and engage with them well. The strengths in teaching lie in the excellent relationships between staff and pupils and this means that learning is conducted in a very positive climate. Staff use an excellent range of behaviour management techniques to manage challenging behaviour and this ensures that learning is rarely disrupted. Good use is generally made of visual aids, signs and symbols to ensure pupils know the sequence of learning and/or what must be achieved. However, there are occasions when visual aids are shown to pupils but are taken away too quickly, before pupils can digest their content, with the result that pupils remain unclear about the learning purpose.

There are some areas for further development. While pupils are encouraged to show initiative and be independent, there are times when staff do things for pupils which they are quite capable of doing for themselves. There are also occasions when work is not pitched at quite the right level, so learning is consolidated rather than being extended. While lessons are mostly well planned, some lesson objectives do not make sufficiently explicit the level of the work to be done and/or they are not always well enough aligned to pupils' specific learning needs.

The multi-disciplinary approach, where therapists lead or support learning in class, or provide one-to-one support, is effective and has two main benefits. It means that pupils receive the specialist guidance that they need and when therapists teach groups or the whole class, staff observe the methods used which helps to improve their teaching skills. Some individuals are taught, where appropriate, in local primary schools and this provision widens their social interaction and self-confidence as well as further developing their communication and basic skills.

A range of baseline assessments are used to determine pupils' attainment and the exact nature of their difficulties on entry. Staff use a commercial assessment scheme to judge pupils' attainment and progress as they move through the school. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Good use is made of assessment information to determine the targets set in individual education, care and behaviour support plans. Nevertheless, at times information gained could be better used to inform lesson planning and ensure all work is challenging. Senior staff are monitoring the quality of teaching and learning but analysis to pinpoint strengths and weakness in provision is in its infancy. The school does not liaise formally with schools of a similar type to compare the progress made by Woodcroft pupils with that achieved elsewhere or to learn from outstanding practice in similar settings.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, including for children in the early years, is outstanding. Pupils are happy; they like school and their attendance is high. Pupils respond extremely well to the school's non-confrontational approach to managing their behaviour. Physical restraint is rarely used and the positive intervention strategies adopted by staff work very well as pupils like being praised, rewarded and encouraged to behave well and succeed. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is outstanding and their attitudes to learning are very positive. The school is to be congratulated on never having excluded a pupil in its 50 year history.

Pupils' social skills are developing very well. They have formed excellent relationships with staff and are keen to participate in activities. Pupils show great respect to each other and the school environment. There is a real sense of racial harmony and adults and children from different backgrounds get on extremely well. The care, support and guidance pupils receive boosts their self-confidence and self-esteem very effectively.

Religious education and yoga help pupils to reflect on the world at large and develop a sense of self-awareness and appreciation of other people's cultures and lifestyles that are different from their own, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony. Visits to the post office, farms and museums help pupils acquire an understanding of the world of work. Pupils are making a good contribution to the school community by improving the lunch menu and by being involved in the interview process for a new headteacher. They make a positive contribution to the wider community through fundraising for good causes and by recycling.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. There are exceptional levels of care. The adult to pupil ratio is very high and this means that pupils are very well supervised at all times.

Provision is underpinned by good policies, procedures and training that ensures staff are fully prepared for their welfare responsibilities. At the time of the last inspection some policies and procedures were not reviewed regularly, or dated, to ensure that

their contents reflected current practice. The requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage were not fully reflected in school records and guidance. These weaknesses have been remedied effectively. All policies are up-to-date, reflect the provision made in all phases and are dated. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. All staff, including the designated person for child protection have been appropriately trained to fulfil their child protection duties effectively. Risk assessments for individuals, the premises and school activities are very thorough. Transport procedures are excellent and ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure when travelling.

The school successfully promotes a healthy lifestyle. For example, pupils have weekly activities such as swimming, forest walks and physical education activities that provide exercise and keep pupils fit. The school nurse has an excellent overview of pupils' specific medical needs so that individuals are kept in good health. The administration of medicines is secure. Accidents and physical restraints are formally recorded; however, the views of pupils following a restraint are not sought or recorded.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the required recruitment and vetting checks are carried out on staff and others to confirm their suitability to work with children. The single central register meets regulatory requirements.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school is located in a Georgian property that has been suitably adapted for educational use. The facilities enable effective learning in a safe and secure environment. Classrooms vary in size but are adequate for the number of pupils using them. Furniture and fittings are suitable for those with special educational needs and disabilities. The standard of decoration, cleanliness and tidiness is satisfactory. There are sufficient washrooms for adults, pupils and visitors and appropriate facilities exist for those who are ill. There is sufficient outdoor space for play and recreation.

Provision of information

All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others. Parents and carers receive informative newsletters about school life and detailed reports about their children's attainment and progress. Very good links have been established with parents and carers and they hold the school in high regard. They have plenty of opportunities to participate in the school's work through Parent Forum meetings, where senior staff seek their views about the quality of education provided, and via social and training events.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- use assessment information more effectively to inform lesson planning so that lesson objectives are always suitably aligned to pupils' specific capabilities in order that work is always pitched at the right level
- ensure that staff do not do tasks or activities for the children, when they are capable of doing it themselves, because this restricts independent learning
- improve the analysis of the outcomes from the monitoring of teaching and learning to pinpoint the main strengths and weaknesses in provision and their impact
- consider liaising with schools of a similar type to help compare and benchmark the attainment and progress of Woodcroft pupils with similar pupils elsewhere and to learn from outstanding practice in similar settings.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for pupils with complex learning difficulties		
Date school opened	January 1963		
Age range of pupils	2–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 29	Girls: 7	Total: 36
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 30	Girls: 7	Total: 37
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£49,506.93		
Address of school	Whitakers Way Baldwins Hill Loughton IG10 1SQ		
Telephone number	020 8508 1369		
Email address	mail@woodcroftschoo.net		
Headteacher	Margaret Newton		
Proprietor	Woodcroft School Limited		

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.



22 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Woodcroft School, Loughton, IG10 1SQ

Hello, I am one of the inspectors that visited your school. I enjoyed my visit very much. Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming and a special thanks to those who showed inspectors around the school and introduced us to the staff and children. Inspectors judge that your school provides you with a good quality of education.

This is what we liked most.

- You like school and say that you learn lots there.
- The atmosphere in the school is special and staff and pupils from different backgrounds get on so well together.
- Teaching and the curriculum are good and this means that you achieve well.
- You say that you feel safe and secure and are not bullied.
- Your behaviour is outstanding and you are really friendly and smile a lot.
- You are extremely well cared for. All of the staff do all that they can to ensure you are happy, kept safe and are properly looked after at all times.
- You say that you know how well you are learning and that teachers help you to learn to speak, read, write and you get the help you need to do your mathematics work.

We have asked the proprietors and staff to do some things to make the school even better, by:

- improving lesson planning so that work is always matched to your needs and ability
- ensuring staff do not do things for you when you are capable of doing things for yourself
- checking teaching and learning even more closely to find out what is working well and what must be improved
- linking up with other schools to compare your school's performance with others.

Yours sincerely

David Rzeznik
Lead inspector