

Woodlands Secondary School

Northwell Drive, Marsh Farm, Luton, LU3 3SP

Inspection dates 17–18 January 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well and some make exceptionally good progress in lessons.
- Teaching is nearly always at least good and often outstanding. Teachers use pictures and objects very well to help students to understand and communicate.
- The recent introduction of work that is better linked to students' interests has added to their enjoyment of learning.
- The sixth form is good and increased visits into the community support students' development well.
- Given students' highly complex needs, behaviour is good and parents say that their children feel safe in school.
- Outstanding leadership by the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher and acting deputy is speeding up school improvement.
- Senior leaders are supported increasingly well by other staff who have leadership responsibilities and the governing body is ambitious for the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The school does not use national guidance as well as it could to judge students' achievement. The governing body has not been closely involved in looking at data.
- Occasionally, teachers are not precise enough in deciding what they want different students to learn or they give more-able students work that is too easy for them.
- The school is, rightly, working to match college placements and work experience more closely to students' individual needs in the sixth form.
- Risk assessments focus more on students' personal care than on tackling the most challenging behaviour, and leaders do not keep as close a check as they could on incidents.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team visited 24 lessons, some jointly with senior leaders, and spent additional time observing lunchtimes and sampling students' work.
- Meetings were held with the acting headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the acting deputy and the assistant headteacher, other staff and two members of the governing body. A telephone discussion took place with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the nine responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and analysed questionnaires completed by 39 members of staff.
- Documents scrutinised during the inspection included the school's self-evaluation, the school development plan and performance data. Inspectors also looked at records relating to aspects of behaviour, teachers' planning and the systems used for assessment.

Inspection team

Margaret Goodchild, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Hermione Horn	Additional Inspector
Sa'ad Khaldi	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This special school serves the needs of students with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many students also have autistic spectrum disorders and a large proportion have highly complex needs, including challenging behaviour. All the students have a statement of special educational needs.
- In the sixth form, the school provides mainly for students with the most complex needs and who are not likely to benefit from full-time attendance at college from the age of 16.
- A high proportion of students are of minority ethnic heritage, mostly from Pakistani or Black African backgrounds. The percentage of students who come from homes where English is an additional language is high although many students use other forms of communication other than, or as well as, speech.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium (additional funding allocated by the government for certain groups of students, in this case those who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is high.
- Some students in Years 10 and 11 and in Years 12 to 14 attend Barnfield College for part of their time. Groups of students also use the facilities at e-Learning @ Luton to support their work in information and communication technology.
- A long-serving headteacher retired in July 2012. An acting headteacher, who is also headteacher of an outstanding special school (Richmond Hill School) in Luton, took over the leadership of Woodlands in September 2012 for this academic year. A new deputy headteacher took up post in April 2012. The deputy headteacher from Richmond Hill leads Woodlands for part of each week, in the role of acting deputy headteacher, while the acting headteacher spends time in her own school. The school intends to appoint a permanent headteacher to start in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring teachers always use information about what students can already do and need to learn next when planning their lessons
 - always giving more-able students work that is hard enough for them and making sure they are in classes that best suit their needs
 - making sure activities are always appropriate to the ages of older students, particularly those with profound and complex needs
 - improving learning opportunities in the sixth form through matching work experience and college placements more closely to the needs and future hopes of individual students.
- Build on existing strengths in leadership by:
 - sharpening the use of national guidance to judge students' achievement and school effectiveness
 - ensuring this information is used by leaders at all levels, teachers and members of the governing body to identify where improvements could be made
 - making sure that risk assessments identify clearly where students' behaviour presents a particular challenge and keeping a close check on the record of incidents.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most students make at least the amount of progress expected, given their low starting points, and some make outstanding progress within individual lessons. There are occasions, though, when some students make less progress than they could when work is not matched precisely to their learning needs.
- Recent analysis of data suggests that there are no marked differences between the achievement of different groups, including students with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, those of minority ethnic heritage or who are known to be eligible for free school meals.
- All groups of students make good progress in developing their communication skills. In mathematics, students with severe learning difficulties and some with autistic spectrum disorders learn to count, add and take away, recognise coins, solve simple problems and play games involving numbers.
- Students make good progress in literacy and more-able students across the school show a clear knowledge of the sounds that letters make. They use this well in their writing and several students also read fluently. This supports their learning well in other subjects. In a lesson in the sixth form, more-able students were able to read the questions on their mathematics worksheet and successfully completed a number of sheets in the course of the lesson.
- Pupil premium funding is appropriately spent and is having a positive effect on the progress of students known to be eligible for free school meals. The school made the decision to concentrate spending on improving its information and communication technology resources because many of these students do not have access to computers at home. The purchase of specialist equipment is increasing students' confidence and their communication and social skills.
- The school makes very good use of the facilities provided by e-Learning @ Luton and, as a result of time spent there, students in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 have produced imaginative pieces of work using images and music. Some of the best work in school takes place also in response to imaginative topics, such as those on Harry Potter and Superheroes.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good and there is an increasing amount of outstanding teaching across the school, with some that is exemplary.
- Teachers establish a positive atmosphere for learning in their classrooms. They have warm and encouraging relationships with their students and place much emphasis on developing their social and communication skills. Teamwork is strong and teachers make good use of their teaching assistants, many of whom are very skilled.
- Teachers use information and communication technology well to support students' learning. They also make good use of pictures and objects, especially for students with autistic spectrum disorders, to support the development of their communication skills and to make sure they are clear about their targets.
- Where teaching is outstanding, experiences are matched exceptionally well to students' needs. In an exemplary literacy lesson in Year 9, the teaching was dynamic and every minute was used to best effect. Quickfire questions kept all students concentrating hard. More-able students were constantly challenged and those who needed extra help received exactly the right level of support. In an equally outstanding lesson in Years 7 and 8, the teacher made very imaginative use of resources to stimulate the various senses of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and help them to understand the language of each line in a poem entitled 'The Sea'.
- In a few lessons, teachers do not use information about what students can already do to plan what individuals are meant to learn from particular activities. In these lessons, although students are given tasks of varying difficulty, these are not always matched closely to the next steps in

their learning. This slows their progress.

- Senior leaders have made several changes to class groups since September 2012 but, occasionally, teachers give more-able students work that is too easy for them when they are in classes with students who have a greater level of need. There are also instances when lesson topics are not appropriate to the ages of older students with the most profound difficulties, for instance, when they are based around a story intended for very young children.
- In the sixth form, teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers ensure learning moves at a fast pace and make very good use of visits into the local community.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Most students co-operate very well with the staff and, in the best lessons, they are very enthusiastic and work hard. Despite the highly complex nature of students' needs, disruption in lessons is rare and they behave very well when they come together in a large group. For instance, in an inspirational 'singing and signing' session that involved the whole of the sixth form, behaviour was outstanding.
- The management of behaviour is almost always good and there are many examples where teachers manage behaviour exceptionally well. For instance, in a group of potentially challenging students with autistic spectrum disorders in the sixth form, excellent teamwork amongst the staff, an emphasis on raising students' self-esteem and highly structured lessons has led to outstanding improvements in behaviour.
- In other classes, teachers are usually quick to take preventative action when a student begins to behave inappropriately so that this does not develop into anything significant.
- There have been no exclusions for several years, and parents are confident that their children are safe in school and that behaviour is managed well. Students clearly feel safe and put a great deal of trust in the staff who work with them. The school does all it can to make students aware of how to keep themselves safe, both in school and in the wider community where they encounter 'strangers'. Students' enjoyment of school is evident in their above average attendance.
- Nevertheless, records show that there are instances of physically challenging behaviour by a few students towards teaching assistants. Occasionally, staff do not notice the first signs of challenging behaviour quickly enough. Plans for managing the risks attached to individual students focus too much on their personal care and not enough on how highly challenging behaviour will be kept to a minimum. In addition, the checking of the frequency of behavioural incidents by school leaders is not as rigorous as it could be in order to evaluate the success, or otherwise, of behaviour management plans.

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher, deputy headteacher and acting deputy have all had leadership experience in outstanding schools and bring to Woodlands a clear awareness of what could be done to move this from a good to an outstanding school. Several changes have been made in recent months which are already bringing about improvement.
- Past inaccuracies in the way some staff have judged students' progress and in the use of data are being tackled. Senior leaders have established partnerships with other local special schools to compare judgements about students' progress. A newly installed commercial program is enabling leaders to analyse data more closely, although they are not yet making as much use as they could of national guidance in checking students' progress.
- Senior leaders have an accurate knowledge of strengths in teaching and where further improvement is needed. The management of teachers' performance is rigorous and decisions about salary increases are based on the contribution teachers make to the school's effectiveness. Regular meetings with teachers to discuss the progress of the students in their classes are held in order to strengthen the push to raise achievement and ensure all students have equal

opportunities.

- There have been recent improvements in the range of learning experiences provided for students. A greater focus on topics that are interesting and relevant to students is raising achievement and increasing their enjoyment of learning.
- Increased opportunities for imaginative work are also making a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Relationships between students are good and the school ensures there is no discrimination against any groups.
- Senior leaders are working to match learning opportunities, especially college placements, more precisely to the individual needs and hopes of students in the sixth form. Those who attend the college for part of their time benefit from this experience but all attend the same course, which benefits some more than others, and opportunities for work experience outside of the school are limited. There are good opportunities for students to gain recognition for their achievements through accredited courses.
- Over a number of years, the school has received 'light touch' support from the local authority in recognition of its effectiveness. The local authority has increased its involvement recently, supporting the school well in putting in an acting headteacher.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know that this is a good school and they are eager for it to become outstanding. They ensure that the school's budget is tightly managed and ask challenging questions about finance. They know how the pupil premium money is spent and that it is helping to raise achievement. The governing body is appropriately involved in the management of teachers' performance, including decisions about teachers' salaries. Visits by a core group of governors provide them with information about teaching. As the school has not placed a great deal of emphasis on data in the past, governors have not been closely involved in using it to compare students' progress with that of similar schools nationally. Key governors bring valuable expertise to their roles and members of the governing body take up training opportunities to increase their effectiveness. Members ensure that the school fully meets requirements for safeguarding students.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	109744
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	401072

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	11-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	148
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adetutu Shobande
Headteacher	Jill Miller
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2009
Telephone number	01582 572880
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