

# Woolgrove School, Special Needs Academy

Pryor Way, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 2PT

**Inspection dates** 30 April–1 May 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b> <b>2</b>
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.

- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress in all areas of learning and settle into their routines quickly.
- Pupils throughout the academy build on this good start to their learning and make at least good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In Year 3, pupils make outstanding progress.
- Good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching leads to good learning and progress in lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge, use very well-chosen resources and have excellent relationships with pupils.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Good improvements in behaviour, above average attendance and pupils' positive attitudes to learning enable them to make good progress.
- As a result of good leadership and management, the conversion of the previous school to an academy has been smooth and it is well placed to improve further.
- Leaders, managers and governors make sure that teaching and pupils' achievement are always at least good.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding.
- Teachers do not always provide tasks that are challenging enough to extend the learning of more-able pupils or break tasks down into smaller steps for those who find learning most difficult.
- Teachers do not always inform pupils of their next steps for learning when marking their work.
- Procedures for checking pupils off transport on arrival to the academy have only very recently been developed and have yet to be fully put into practice.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Samples of pupils' work were looked at jointly with subject leaders.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, six academy governors, seven parents and members of staff. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority transport department.
- Inspectors took account of 13 responses to the online survey (Parent View) and the views of staff in their returned questionnaires.
- The academy's work was observed and inspectors looked at a range of documentation. This included policies and procedures for promoting safeguarding, records of incidents and attendance, the self-evaluation summary, minutes of meetings, information about children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and records of pupils' progress in Years 1 to 6.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident which occurred at the setting is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

## Inspection team

Declan McCarthy, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Susan Lewis

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a special educational needs academy for primary-aged pupils, all of whom have a statement of special educational needs for moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders or speech, language and communication needs. Approximately half the pupils have been identified with varying degrees of autism.
- The majority of pupils have additional needs including complex syndromes, specific learning difficulties, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the academy receives the pupil premium (additional government funding, in this case for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or in local authority care) is above average.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and a few speak English as an additional language.
- There are approximately twice as many boys as girls on roll.
- The academy provides outreach support for approximately 100 schools in its catchment area.
- The former Woolgrove School converted to a special school academy in April 2012. At that time, it changed its designation from moderate learning difficulties to moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and speech, language and communication needs. This is its first inspection as an academy.

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

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching so that it leads to outstanding achievement by always:
  - providing challenging tasks to extend the learning of more-able pupils
  - making sure that learning tasks for those who find learning most difficult are broken down into smaller achievable steps
  - informing pupils of their next steps for learning when their work is marked.
- Fully implement the new procedures for checking pupils off transport on their arrival to the academy.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Given the nature and complexity of their disabilities and special educational needs, children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is low. They settle into their routines quickly and make good progress in all areas of learning, especially in communication and social interaction skills. This is mainly due to strong leadership which promotes excellent links with parents and close teamwork among the staff.
- As they move through the academy, all groups of pupils - including girls and boys - build on this good progress so, by the end of Year 1, they are beginning to identify the sounds that letters make and use these in reading and spelling. In Years 1 and 2 and Years 3 to 6, they make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and those with speech, language and communication needs make consistently good progress in developing their communication and social interaction skills. This is because there is a strong emphasis on the use of wide-ranging communication aids for individual and group learning activities for these pupils, and this approach is consistently applied by all staff.
- The academy's data show that pupils in Year 3 make outstanding progress, and this was also seen in some outstanding lessons where expectations for learning were very high.
- Pupils who receive additional support through pupil premium funding make at least the same progress as their classmates. The few children who are in local authority care make outstanding progress as a result of additional, highly effective, support from outside agencies and therapists.
- Pupils with additional disabilities and special educational needs, such as complex syndromes, make equally good progress as their classmates because learning resources, such as the sensory room and communication aids, are carefully chosen to ensure their participation in learning.
- Nevertheless, there is a slight variation in the progress some pupils make across year groups in particular areas, as seen in the academy's accurate data and in lesson observations. Occasionally, more-able pupils do not make enough progress because tasks are not challenging enough for them, or those who find learning most difficult are given the same work as their classmates and they find the activity too difficult.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Consistently good teaching throughout the academy results in good learning and progress over time. Sometimes, teaching is outstanding, which leads to outstanding learning and progress.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge and information about pupils' previous learning and progress to select resources and activities which build on their knowledge and understanding. For example in an outstanding mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 3 placed a hoop over a patch of daisies in the outdoor area and were challenged to estimate the total. They had to count them out and then accurately record the number of daisies located inside the hoop. As a result, pupils experienced a sense of awe and wonder, displayed great enthusiasm for this activity and all made rapid progress in estimating and checking the accuracy of their recordings.

- The teaching of communication, literacy and numeracy skills across the school is good. Teachers use a variety of methods, including for linking letter sounds to letter names and specialist techniques to teach reading. Pupils read widely to their level of ability and the detailed comments in individual reading records show pupils' growing confidence in reading.
- Teachers and learning support assistants make consistently good use of a wide range of communication aids, such as real objects, photographs, symbols, signing and technological aids, to ensure pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and speech, language and communication needs make consistently good progress in their communication and social interaction.
- This was seen in an outstanding outdoor activities lesson where pupils followed a trail and explored the contents of different bags without looking. They were then challenged to hold each item up and tell other pupils what the item was and what it was used for. Throughout, learning support assistants worked seamlessly with the teacher to sign and model consistent language in describing the use of objects found by pupils. As a result, pupils were able, for example, to say 'shuttlecock' and explain that it was used in playing badminton.
- Learning support assistants are used well to support the learning of all pupils, particularly focusing on explaining new ideas by building on pupils' understanding of technical words. They model examples and make sure that pupils use additional resources properly, for example, to support their handwriting. Occasionally, the effectiveness of learning support assistants' work is limited when teachers do not break learning tasks down into smaller steps when planning activities for those pupils who find learning most difficult.
- Teachers usually have high expectations for pupils' learning and use effective questioning to extend their thinking. On a few occasions, pupils finish tasks quickly and when staff notice this in lessons, they give them more demanding tasks to extend their learning further. Pupils' written work also shows that learning is sometimes too easy, especially for the more able. It also shows that marking does not always inform pupils of their next steps for learning, despite good verbal feedback given in lessons.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Pupils respond positively to the consistent and effective management of their behaviour by teachers and learning support assistants. As a result, their behaviour in lessons is good and sometimes outstanding. Pupils develop good attitudes to learning through the excellent relationships promoted by teachers. This also leads to rapid progress for pupils with more challenging behaviours, as highlighted in discussion with parents during the inspection and reflected in pupils' above average attendance and punctuality.
- Pupils nearly always stay safe and adopt safe practices in school, for example, when walking from their classrooms to the outdoor areas. Parents who responded to Parent View and those who expressed their views during the inspection confirmed that behaviour and safety are at least good and sometimes outstanding.
- During discussions, pupils said they always feel safe in school and that behaviour is good. They said that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively should any incident arise. Pupils are developing an increasing awareness of different forms of bullying, through well-chosen topics in the personal social and health education programme. This also increases their awareness of how to avoid stay safe outside school, for example, the importance of not talking to strangers,.

- There have been no exclusions and good behaviour seen during the inspection accurately reflects good behaviour over time. There are only a few incidents of unacceptable behaviour recorded in the academy's incident book and these have been dealt with effectively.

### **The leadership and management** are good

- Strong leadership by the headteacher, who is ably supported by the deputy headteacher and senior leaders, has led to the smooth conversion of the former school to an academy. It has also ensured that all staff have been well trained to meet the needs of the changing and more complex learning needs of its pupils.
- Robust management of staff performance through the regular monitoring of teaching and learning, supported by clearly targeted and well-chosen opportunities for professional development, has led to teaching that is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Leaders ensure that any weaknesses are successfully tackled and improvements in teaching are closely linked to increases in teachers' salary.
- The academy has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development through its analysis of the learning and progress of different groups of pupils across the school. Staff make good use of this information to identify well-chosen priorities for improvement, such as working to increase the consistency of challenge for more-able pupils.
- There are wide ranging opportunities for pupils to enrich their learning, such as through visits by Morris dancers, visits to places of interest, lunchtime clubs, residential visits, and the use of sensory rooms and the wild and sensory gardens in the school. These activities, together with a variety of other learning opportunities such as projects on Africa, links with India and celebration of different faiths, contribute to pupils' outstanding cultural development.
- Staff morale is high and all staff contribute to the strong family ethos in the school which is recognised by parents and has a very positive effect on the outstanding promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Pupils' moral development is also considerably enhanced by the role models for good behaviour provided by all staff and carefully planned learning opportunities to discuss right from wrong in the personal, social and health education programme.
- Strong links with parents are reflected in their high participation in, and high levels of satisfaction with, the annual reviews of their children's statements and the valuable information they receive about their children's progress in school.
- Leaders have ensured that pupil premium funding is used flexibly and effectively to support the learning and well-being of those pupils who are entitled to receive it, such as payment for out-of-school activities and additional learning support or therapies.
- Some aspects of safeguarding are promoted extremely well, such as regular and up-to-date training, high levels of vigilance in the checking of the suitability of staff and in supervising pupils to ensure their safety in all areas of the school. However, this aspect of leadership requires improvement because the school has only very recently developed its procedures for ensuring that all pupils are accounted for when they disembark from transport on arrival to school and, as such, they are not yet fully in place.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body, whose members are also the trustees of the academy, ensure that all statutory requirements are met including those for safeguarding. They check on the effectiveness of the school's policies and procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare and safety and they act quickly and decisively when shortcomings are brought to their attention. They have a realistic view of the quality of teaching and its impact on the learning of pupils, based on scrutiny of the academy's work and through first-hand visits. Governors use the information from data about the progress different pupils are making to influence priorities for development. They are effective in overseeing the arrangements for managing the performance of the headteacher, which are based on the academy's priorities for development. They also ensure that targets to improve the performance of all staff are linked to those of the headteacher. They have a good understanding of how funding for pupil premium is used and hold the academy to account for its use.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137997
<b>Local authority</b>	N/A
<b>Inspection number</b>	408923

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Academy special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	106
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Brian Frederick
<b>Headteacher</b>	Susan Selley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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