

Woodlands School

Whitegate Drive, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY3 9HF

Inspection dates 24–25 September 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		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students achieve well. Nearly all make progress from what are always very low starting points. No group of students underachieves.
- Teaching is usually good and some is outstanding. The best teaching is lively, enthuses the students and challenges them to do their best.
- Behaviour is excellent and students are kept safe. There is a lovely atmosphere around the school and students are happy. Their parents have every confidence in the school to keep their children safe and well cared for.
- The sixth form is good. Students are well taught and given a lot of support to prepare them well for leaving school and becoming more independent.
- The school is very well led by the acting headteacher. She is extremely well supported by her acting deputy. Both are highly respected by staff, parents and students.
- There is a very keen understanding by leaders and managers about the importance of improving teaching. This has helped to further improve teaching and learning since the last inspection. This is definitely an improving school.
- There is outstanding provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are exceptionally well taught in a highly stimulating environment. It is here where children take the earliest steps in learning how to communicate and how to get along well with each other.
- Governance is strong. Governors are deeply committed to the school and have a lot of helpful skills to support leaders and managers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is still some teaching that requires improvement.
- Relatively weaker teaching is characterised by lapses in the pace of lessons, lack of challenge for some students and a focus on reinforcement rather than new learning.
- Teaching could be improved by more imaginative use and management of support staff.

Information about this inspection

- Eleven lessons were observed and nearly all teachers were seen. Regular discussions were held with the headteacher and further discussions included those with the Chair of the Governing Body and a representative of the local authority.
- An inspector chatted with parents at the school gate and took into account the views of parents as expressed in a school questionnaire at the beginning of the current school year. There were not enough responses to the Ofsted on-line questionnaire (Parent View) for these to be made available.
- Inspectors looked at examples of students' work and records of their progress kept by teachers, leaders and managers.
- Inspectors communicated with many students in an informal way.
- Many documents were looked at including those relating to keeping students safe, how thoroughly the school keeps check of its own performance and how it plans for improvement.

Inspection team

Alistair Younger, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- All students have a statement of special educational needs reflecting the severity and complexity of their needs and disabilities. The main groups are students with severe or profound learning difficulties and those with a high degree of autism.
- Many more than average students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. The pupil premium is additional funding for those children who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children who are looked after and children from service families. In this school this applies to the first two groups.
- Most students are White British. Boys outnumber girls by about two-to-one.
- Since the last inspection the headteacher has left and has been replaced by an acting headteacher who was previously her deputy. This arrangement has been in place for three weeks.
- Negotiations are under way with another special school in Blackpool to consider the possibilities of federation; with a single governing body and an executive headteacher assuming responsibility for the leadership, management and governance of both schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eliminate any teaching that is less than good and increase the proportion that is outstanding by:
 - giving weaker teachers the opportunity to see what can realistically be expected of students by giving them opportunities to observe the practice of those teachers in the school who are consistently outstanding
 - making sure that all teachers take care to maximise the use of time in lessons and avoid wasting it through lack of organisation
 - making sure that every lesson includes new and exciting challenges for pupils whilst still reinforcing earlier learning.
- Where necessary give teachers help in understanding that their leadership and management of sometimes large classroom teams is a very important part of their contribution to the leadership and management of the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

Is good

- In relation to their starting points students achieve well. Many arrive at the school at the very earliest stages of learning and development. A few, with the most profound and complex difficulties, make incredibly slow but hugely important progress in their ability to express themselves and demonstrate their ability to make choices. This gives them control and dignity in their lives. Some of the more able students reach a position where they can join with peers in mainstream schools and colleges and achieve greater independence. Everyone leaves with a qualification.
- Good achievement applies to all groups. The school is successful in ensuring that all students share equal opportunities to learn and make progress.
- Students supported through the pupil premium achieve equally to all others.
- Boys and girls make very similar progress. There is very little difference in achievement in different subjects.
- Children get off to a particularly good start in the Nursery and Reception class. Just days into the new school year, children were seen to be learning routines, being physically active, communicating with adults and each other and beginning to communicate in different ways, often non-verbally, to express needs and feelings.
- Students in the sixth form achieve well in the ways they discover how to live more independently and to become valued members of society.
- In addition to English and mathematics, the focus of the school's work is the promotion of personal and social skills and the importance of helping students to communicate by whatever means possible. Achievement is good in both areas. Staff are very highly skilled in helping students to use technological aids, pictures, signs and symbols to express themselves. The impact of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very clear to see in the way that they develop their personal and social qualities.
- Physical and sporting achievement are often limited by students' disabilities but everything possible is done to maximise opportunities including using extra funding to provide more swimming opportunities, the levelling of a playing field and the employment of a football coach.

The quality of teaching

Is good

- Good teaching results in all groups of students learning well and making good progress. Much of it is outstanding but there is also some that requires improvement and leaders and managers have identified areas where support is needed. There is no evidence of inadequate teaching.
- Some teaching is simply stunning. Often for very different reasons. A sixth form lesson was characterised by recognition and respect for the maturity of students and the simple objective of helping them to make the link between enterprise and money. A Nursery and Reception lesson was characterised by the total involvement of all children in activities particularly well matched to their abilities and involving everyone equally. A Key Stage 2 lesson, described as inspirational, involved students of all ages being equally challenged and motivated and the excellent management of challenging behaviour.
- Nearly all teachers plan lessons carefully to ensure that all students are suitably challenged and supported well to help them to learn as much as possible. The views of leaders, managers and inspectors agree that this is usually the case.
- Teachers are particularly effective in the way that they recognise the very different methods by which students communicate. Good use is made of technology and equally good use is made of simpler aids such as the use of pictures, signs and symbols to help reassure students and help them to express their understanding of what is going on and what their needs are.
- Most teachers try to include new learning into lessons rather than concentrating on reinforcing

prior learning. They recognise that many pupils need reinforcement of learning. Where teaching is weaker, there is an over emphasis of this.

- Weaker teaching is mainly characterised by lack of organisation. This leads to moments where the movement of students or changeovers between activities leads to students losing interest or valuable time being wasted. Occasionally lessons that begin with a bang, fizzle out meaning that the impetus is lost.
- Sometimes there is very little evidence of new learning being introduced, with teachers taking comfort in repetitive reinforcement of earlier learning. This neither encourages nor enthuses students. Occasionally, teachers do not make the best possible use of some highly skilled support staff. In the main the use of support staff is a strength of teaching but, sometimes, communication between teachers and classroom assistants gets confused. At other times, especially when teachers are introducing lessons, classroom assistants could be used more effectively.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

Are outstanding

- Students do everything they can to behave well. They are respectful and friendly and they support each other well. In lessons they are as attentive as possible and show a lot of excitement when they learn new things or get praised. They love their school.
- Parents are almost unanimous in feeling that behaviour in the school is always at least good. They are equally unanimous in saying that if there was any bullying or harassment it would be dealt with promptly and effectively. What is encouraging is that here is no evidence of bullying, harassment, racism or sexism anywhere around the school or in records and that most parents do not know how well the school deals with it because they have no reason to consider the possibility.
- Pupils love their school unreservedly. They feel safe and well cared for. Many cannot express this verbally but it is very clear from their calmness and trust that they are happy. Those who can communicate are effusive in how much they appreciate what is being done to help them.
- Lunch and break times are harmonious affairs. With minimal supervision, students help each other, act independently and are friendly.
- Attendance is every bit as good as the national average for all schools and much better than for similar schools. Everything possible is done to promote maximum attendance.
- Staff are highly skilled in recognising the difference between typical behaviour reflecting identified difficulties and students testing the boundaries.

The leadership and management

Are good

- There is strong leadership of teaching and learning. Teachers are set rigorous targets for improvement and the best teachers are appropriately rewarded.
- The acting headteacher has had an immediate impact in improving morale amongst the whole of the staff, many of whom forcefully express support for her.
- A strong sense of ambition is shared by leaders, management and governors. There has been a well focussed drive to improve teaching and learning. Leaders and managers know exactly where the strengths and weaknesses within the school lie. They are very perceptive.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management has been well tested with the change in headship. The school sails forward, on an even keel under the extremely effective and often inspirational leadership of the acting headteacher and the acting deputy headteacher.
- The quality of teaching is constantly monitored. Weaker teachers are being given good support to help them improve. Leaders have not yet made full use of the outstanding teaching in the school to inspire others. Newly qualified teachers and those new to the school are supported by some of the best teachers in the school.
- Self-evaluation is extremely thorough. At times though, it is over-optimistic in its conclusions. It

does pick out all of the areas most in need of improvement and uses these to create a very good improvement plan.

- Leaders and managers ensure that there is a very strong focus on promoting communication skills and the personal and social development of students. This appropriately over-rides a focus on literacy.
- There is a good curriculum. Students engage well in their timetabled activities and enjoy all the 'extras'. They participate keenly in adventure and sporting activities, including those which involve them staying away from home for a night or two.
- Parents are highly supportive of the school. They like the way it communicates with them in a way that they understand and the manner in which it explains how their children are getting on. Nearly all parents attend review meetings because they feel unthreatened, listened to and understood.
- Statutory requirements including those relating to the safeguarding of students are fully met. There is no discrimination whatsoever and the promotion of students' personal development, incorporating their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. This is of the utmost importance to parents.
- The local authority provides appropriate support. This is not a school that causes any concern. The main worry amongst staff is that they are unsure about the local authority's plans for the future. This has very recently been passed on to the governance of the two schools involved and is a welcome initiative.
- The weakness in leadership and management is when teachers do not lead and manage their large classroom teams sufficiently well. In every classroom there is almost as many staff as students. Usually this is well justified but occasionally it is a waste.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance of the school is strong because governors are highly aware of the progress students are making. If they have concerns they are confident to ask leaders and managers why this is the case and to challenge them in their responses. Governors are devoted to their school far beyond the usual. They never lose interest in every child who enters their school's doors. Governors have been careful as to how extra government funding is being used. They are using it sensibly and productively.

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	119871
Local authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	426054

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Howson
Acting Headteacher	Glynis Alexander
Date of previous school inspection	14 September 2010
Telephone number	01253 316722
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