

St John's Wood Community School

Longridge, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 8PA

Inspection dates

26 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	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.

- The school is transformed for the better since its last inspection 14 months ago. It looks and feels very different. All aspects of the school are now good.
- Students enjoy school. They are settled and feel safe. The school provides a broad and relevant curriculum with something for everyone.
- Students' achievement is improving rapidly. Already, students achieve well, obtaining more GCSEs, vocational qualifications and accreditations than ever before. They have good attitudes to learning and gain in independence, confidence and self-esteem.
- Teaching is good and there is teaching of exceptional quality. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is very strong. Their commitment to the young people is outstanding and it shows.
- The arrival of a new headteacher, supported by a highly effective executive headteacher, heralded the beginning of the school's rejuvenation. Leaders at all levels now make very effective contributions to the growing success of the school. There is strength of leadership in depth, including in governance.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- New policies and practices are still being consolidated and reviewed. In most aspects of its work the school believes it can do better still.
- Specifically, despite significant gains in each aspect, further improvements are required in students' level of engagement in lessons, the amount of recording they do and in attendance.

Information about this inspection

- Five lessons were observed. On the day of the inspection around a half of students were undertaking activities out of school. An inspector talked to students about their experiences on their return.
- Students' work on displays and in workbooks was examined. Documentation provided by the school, including that concerned with safeguarding and child protection was studied.
- Meetings were held with governors, senior staff, students, teachers, teaching assistants, the school health adviser and a representative of the local authority.
- There were no entries on Ofsted's on-line website Parent View. However, responses of parents to questionnaires from the school about their views were examined.

Inspection team

Brian Padgett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- St John's Wood Community School is a special school for students of secondary-school age who have complex learning needs. The school is designated for students with behavioural, emotional and social learning difficulties.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of pupils for which the school receives the pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after by the local authority.)
- The school was placed in special measures in September 2012. A new headteacher was appointed in October 2012. The school became a member of a federation of three special schools. The executive headteacher of the federation provides additional leadership for the school.
- The school has plans to become an academy under the management of a multi-academy trust in February 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' engagement in learning by ensuring teaching is more closely aligned to students' personalised learning needs.
- Raise expectations of students' writing.
- Maintain the school's relentless focus on improving attendance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- In the space of just over a year, students' combined achievements have doubled. They attained twice as well in 2013 as they did in 2012. In the recent past, all students left the school not in further education, employment or training. In 2013, all students left for further education, employment or training.
- Students attain a broad range of qualifications and accreditations. Achievement in art and physical education is highest, with certain students gaining good GCSEs. The school offers vocational qualifications as well as GCSEs and a range of accreditations that demonstrate students' growing preparedness for life beyond school.
- Students in Key Stage 3 make the best progress as they are least affected by the legacy of the past.
- All groups make broadly similar progress with the exception of a small number of students whose attendance is particularly poor. Mostly, because of the magnitude or character of their difficulties, these students are in transition to alternative placements and will not continue at St John's Wood. There is another small group of students who are educated off-site. The school coordinates their provision well and students are on track to achieve at least accreditation for achieving basic, functioning skills.
- Standards in mathematics are higher than standards in English. As a consequence, the school has embarked on a programme of interventions in reading, writing and spelling. One-to-one support is provided. Intervention is proving highly effective with individual students making impressive gains in their reading ages and in their enjoyment of books. Spelling, writing and handwriting are also improving but not at such a good rate.
- Progress in lessons is good. Most students are engaged for most of the time. With outstanding teaching, each student is fully engaged, as inspectors saw in art and on students' return from an out-of-school visit on an environmental project. Despite some better examples of writing, from physical education lessons, for example, students do not write enough in their workbooks to improve their writing and recording skills.
- Students for who the pupil premium is intended make the same good progress in their learning and personal development as others. Many of the strategies to promote learning and well-being are those that benefit students from poorer backgrounds and those looked after particularly well. These include visits out of school, homework and after-school clubs, one-to-one interventions to catch up on basic skills and opportunities for them to excel in creative subjects and sport.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Success in teaching within St John's Wood is strongly related to the quality of relationships between staff and students. It is also a matter of teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. Relationships and teamwork are excellent. The ethos of classrooms is relaxed and purposeful in turn; a highly effective learning environment for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- There has been significant improvement in the rigour of teaching since the last section 5 inspection. Teachers' planning, marking, assessment and target-setting are now good, as is the involvement of students in setting challenging targets. Books are well presented and maintained. Pride is returning. Displays celebrate success.
- Teaching assistants play a major role in teaching and learning, as role models and in raising students' belief in themselves. They are valued members of staff who increasingly take on responsibilities as the school extends what it provides for students, for example, in cookery, in literacy and in after-school clubs.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding. Although students' engagement in lessons is good, it is rarely good enough to lead to outstanding learning. Only when students' interests and enthusiasm are

really captured is learning of outstanding quality seen. However, staff are now well placed to take the next steps and plan lessons that do just this.

- The curriculum is good. It has broadened considerably over the last year. A good range of subjects is provided. There is a new focus on literacy with a further focus on numeracy planned. Opportunities for learning and personal development out of school have increased, including college placements for older students. Staff have many contacts with external providers with specialist skills to help the school develop a more personalised curriculum that meets students' needs effectively.
- All groups benefit from the good teaching. The small number of girls are well integrated into the school and present as settled as the boys.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school is calm. Students' behaviour in class and around school is generally good. They feel safe and have trust in the staff. Students know the school has improved a lot and appreciate the increased approachability of staff.
- Staff and visitors to the school comment on its changed ethos. In no small part this is because of two significant changes. The school has been refurbished to a high standard, the hall in particular. All areas are carpeted. There are soft chairs and tables in groups around the hall and a wall-mounted flat-screen television with news programmes. The hall has become a meeting place where students and staff mingle. There is a pool room off the hall, and a common room for Year 11s and a place where students can make drinks are planned. The second significant change is that doors are open. Locks have been removed. In particular, the headteacher's and deputy headteacher's offices now open onto the hall and their doors open throughout the day.
- The impact of the change in the quality of the school environment and the new openness on students' behaviour and attitude to school is difficult to quantify but easier to sense. The school now has a relaxed and calm feel. Students have a sense of pride and ownership. This is their school. Senior staff are very accessible. The new building does not replace the need for excellent relationships between staff and students but it supports it hugely.
- The number of exclusions of students has halved in each of the last three terms to a quarter of the level a year ago. Attendance runs at between 80% and 85% but is considerably skewed by the persistent absence of a very small number of pupils. Management provides a convincing account of the school's efforts to get these students into school or to provide them with placements that suit their often extreme predicaments.
- The care and welfare of students are considerably enhanced by the coordinating work of the outreach worker, who has excellent connections with parents and a range of external agencies and providers who are involved with students. Links with health are strong and students benefit from the involvement of the school health adviser.
- By the nature of their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, students are not able to control their behaviour and emotions at all times. Staff are vigilant. Good classroom management and close relationships resolve most issues in the school but, when problems arise, often associated with what has happened out of school, extra staff are on hand to provide support for students. Supervision is unobtrusive but levels are high. Pastoral care is very effective.
- Responsibility and independence are promoted well. The school has an effective school council. Year 11 students are trusted to leave the premises to go to local shops without supervision. Response from the community has been nothing but positive with students described as 'well-mannered'. Students attend colleges where courses are appropriate and the school maintains a close track of their progress.

The leadership and management are good

- The transformation of the school is the result of the appointment of a headteacher, strongly supported by an executive headteacher, with a different vision for the school. That vision, fully supported by the local authority, is now substantially in place. Over the year, the capacity of the school to improve has been consolidated. New appointments of deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have strengthened leadership further. Teachers feel empowered to bring forward new ideas as a result of increased delegation of responsibility. Middle leaders are now playing a crucial part in school improvement. There is a momentum for continued improvement and a growing staff pride in what has been achieved.
- The leadership to improve teaching is proving effective. Senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching and provide rigorous monitoring, linked closely to the performance management of teachers and the supervision of teaching assistants.
- The school has received valuable support and challenge from a number of quarters, including the local authority, a School Improvement Partner and particularly through its association with an outstanding special school within the federation. Joint training events have been a feature of this association.
- The school has become more outward-looking. Partnerships are a strength of its work. Staff liaise with a number of colleges, external providers, health and social care, other schools and external agencies in order to support students and their families and provide a personalised offer for each. The curriculum and options to broaden students' achievement and qualifications have been developed imaginatively.
- The arrangements for the safeguarding of students and for child protection are secure.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The improvement in governance has mirrored the improvement in leadership generally. The governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They are frequent visitors, each holding a specific responsibility. They bring a wide range of skills and experience to the role, including knowledge of data analysis and pupil premium funding. They have undertaken training and now provide the school with support and challenge based on first-hand knowledge and a good understanding of performance, including the quality of teaching and performance pay.

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	131733
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	427742

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sanjay Vaja
Headteacher	Tony Armstrong
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2012
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