

The Woodlands

Broom Road, Ferryhill DL17 8AN

Inspection dates	15–16 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and leadership team are determined to give every pupil the chance to succeed. Leaders' relentless drive to improve the school is strongly supported by staff.
- Pupils make good progress often from relatively low starting points. Younger pupils usually return to mainstream education and older pupils go on to suitable courses or training.
- Teaching is good. Teachers plan learning which pupils find interesting and this helps them to make good progress.
- Leaders check the quality of teaching very regularly and provide the training and support for staff so that they can improve their skills.
- Pupils make good progress in English and most improve their standard of reading.
- Pupils generally behave well in lessons and around the buildings. Relationships are good and are based on mutual respect. Pupils say that they feel safe in school.
- As well as academic study, the school provides a good range of work-related courses, either on-site or in partnership with other organisations.
- Staff work well together to make sure that individual pupils and their families receive high-quality support.
- The management committee are very committed to the school. They support the leadership team but also challenge it to make sure that the school continues to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding. Teachers are not consistently using assessment effectively enough to ensure that pupils make outstanding progress.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is not as good as their progress in English.
- The attendance of some boys is not improving quickly enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement and the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - consistently making the best use of information from assessments to plan work which will promote rapid progress and raise achievement
 - using the school's marking policy more consistently to ensure that pupils receive the guidance they need to improve their work
 - using more probing questions to check pupils' understanding in lessons
 - giving teachers more access to specialist support in mathematics so that they can develop the mathematics curriculum in greater depth and help pupils overcome the barriers to learning which are hindering their progress.

- Focus the work on attendance more specifically on the groups of disadvantaged boys in key stage 3 and 4 whose attendance is currently well below expectations.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher, leadership team and management committee are ambitious for the school. They are clear that nothing less than outstanding will be good enough. Staff are supportive of their vision for the school.
- The school has had some significant difficulties since the previous inspection, including periods with an acting leadership team, but these have been overcome.
- The current headteacher has been in post since the summer term of 2015. With the support of the leadership team, middle leaders and the management committee, she has implemented a highly effective programme of change. This has ensured that leaders and staff have tackled the issues identified in the previous report and are significantly improving the quality of education for pupils.
- Sensitive and strong support from the local authority enabled staff to continue to make improvements in teaching, attendance and behaviour, at a time of loss and sadness for the school community.
- The school's self-evaluation is well focused and accurate. Leaders and managers know that changes already implemented need time to have the maximum impact and also know where further improvement is needed to move the school to outstanding.
- The very positive ethos which encourages everyone to believe that they can achieve, promotes a culture of success amongst staff and pupils. The ethos underpins the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and the promotion of British values. These values are seen in lessons and displays and are referred to through pupils' views, and the varied activities pupils engage in. The school's policy of equal opportunities is well promoted.
- The leadership team has put good systems in place to check on the quality of teaching and ensure that expectations are the same on all the sites. Together with middle leaders they regularly monitor progress information, visit lessons and check pupils' work. Leaders are working with the local authority to make sure that the school's judgements are precise. Performance management has been used effectively to address weaker elements of teaching.
- The strong pastoral structure is well managed across all sites to ensure that it provides pupils with the tailored support they need. The systems, which are the same on all sites, have improved behaviour and significantly reduced the number of incidents and exclusions. The work on attendance has reduced the amount of absence, particularly for primary age pupils, but has not yet been as effective for disadvantaged boys in key stages 3 and 4.
- The curriculum is well matched to the needs of different pupils. It supports personal development and well-being very effectively. As well as academic subjects, it includes therapeutic programmes and many activities that pupils enjoy. Vocational courses are carefully chosen to provide pupils with good opportunities which reflect their interests and aspirations. Pupils spoke positively about placements as different as equestrian studies and motor mechanics.
- Partnerships with mainstream schools have been strengthened and are providing better communication relating to the specific needs of pupils. This is both in terms of the provision at The Woodlands and ensuring that the right decisions are made about return to mainstream school or a different placement.
- The additional funding received through the pupil premium is spent well on appropriate activities and support to pupils. This is having the effect of closing the gaps in attainment and progress and enabling disadvantaged pupils to succeed.
- The physical education (PE) and sport premium for primary schools is being used to introduce pupils to a wider range of activities and increase participation in sport. This increased emphasis on physical activity has also had a positive impact on outcomes at the end of key stage 4 where all pupils achieved a recognised qualification in PE.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the management committee use their professional knowledge and expertise well to drive improvements. Several members of the committee are headteachers of local schools and they have a very clear understanding of the needs of the pupils. This has helped the committee to be rigorous in its evaluation of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. The committee has set high expectations for what pupils can achieve.
 - The management committee ensures that performance management is used effectively. Targets set for staff reflect school as well as individual needs and help leaders to manage underperformance and reward good teaching.

- Safeguarding is effective. Policies and procedures are up to date, appropriate checks are made on all staff and they are well trained in a wide range of safeguarding issues. The school monitors the use of alternative providers very carefully to ensure that their safeguarding procedures are also effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Staff are skilled at promoting pupils' personal development and in helping them to overcome the barriers which hinder their learning. The good relationships and the positive atmosphere created help to engage and motivate pupils who may have previously disliked school.
- Most learning is carefully planned to take account of pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers use a good range of academic and practical activities to stimulate, interest and encourage pupils to take part in activities. For example, the good use of the interactive whiteboards in mathematics and English and the opportunities for practical work in design and technology, art and catering help pupils of all ages to gain confidence and realise that they can do well.
- Teachers and a range of learning support staff work closely to ensure that well-planned and timely interventions help pupils to improve their attitudes to learning and catch up on work they may have missed, particularly in English. The support for pupils with special educational needs is similarly well planned and focused on individual needs.
- The needs of the most able pupils are being increasingly well catered for. Inspection evidence indicated a high level of challenge and an expectation that pupils would be able to achieve the highest grades. For example, the work produced in English lessons by the most able pupils in key stage 4 showed excellent analytical skills and the ability to write in depth and with sensitivity whether analysing a poem by Thomas Hardy or evaluating what made a successful persuasive speech. Similarly, in art pupils were working to a high standard.
- The use of assessment and marking is inconsistent across the school. Much of the assessment is effective and used well to make sure gaps in learning are filled, but some assessment has less impact.
- The best marking uses the school policy constructively. It gives pupils clear guidance on what to do to improve. This helps them to continue to try hard even when they find work difficult. This is not, however, consistent enough across the school to ensure outstanding progress.
- As well as assessing and marking written and practical work, teachers routinely question pupils to check their understanding. Where teaching is strong, questioning is used effectively, as for example in key stage 2 reading sessions where pupils were responding well to a discussion about motivation, but sometimes the questioning is not probing enough to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Improving pupils' reading skills is a high priority. Many pupils initially lack confidence in their literacy skills but from the youngest pupils onwards they are helped to make good progress. They enjoy regular reading sessions where they discuss the stories and characters. Relatively few pupils read for pleasure, but this is being developed with a wider choice of books and topics designed to appeal to pupils.
- Teachers recognise the importance of boosting pupils' confidence as well as their mathematical knowledge and skills, and the teaching in mathematics is generally effective. The lack of specialist expertise in mathematics has limited the further development of the curriculum to help pupils become more confident in their understanding and in their ability to use mathematics in different situations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff make promoting personal development and welfare a high priority both in the school and when pupils are working at their placements. They work closely with parents, pupils and a range of agencies to support and help pupils to manage difficulties and challenges. Most pupils respond well to the opportunities available and gain in confidence and skills.
- Alongside their academic work, pupils take part in many different activities to develop a range of skills to prepare them for adult life. They learn to work in teams, to take responsibility for themselves and others and to respond to challenges. For example, pupils in key stage 2 were enthusiastic about the challenge of rock climbing. In key stages 3 and 4 the strong focus on careers guidance helps the vast majority of

pupils to make a successful transition to further education, training or employment.

- Staff invest considerable time and effort into personal, social and health education (PSHE). PSHE lessons and other activities help pupils to learn how to stay safe. Lessons, often using topical material about issues such as bullying and homophobia, are at a level appropriate to the age and maturity of pupils and help to make pupils aware of issues.
- Parents spoken to confirmed that pupils feel safe and that any bullying is very quickly dealt with. Pupils and parents trust staff to deal with issues promptly and effectively. Parents value the contact and support and particularly appreciate the way in which they are kept informed about their children's academic and personal progress. They said that staff are as quick to get in touch when things are going well as they are when there are difficulties.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through a wide range of activities as well as through academic work. The emphasis on the promotion of British values such as the rule of law, democracy and tolerance for the beliefs of others is seen in lessons and made explicit in displays. The election of a school council gives pupils direct experience of democracy and members of the council said that staff took notice of their views.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils generally behave well in lessons and on their alternative placements, showing rapid improvement in their attitudes to learning. Consequently, their attainment and progress improve.
- The staff have high expectations for behaviour and these are supported through a system of rewards and sanctions which pupils understand. They know that privileges have to be earned and this helps them learn to take responsibility for their own actions.
- The different settings are all calm and orderly. Relationships are good and founded on mutual respect. Pupils also respect their environment. The settings are all kept clean and tidy with very little evidence of litter or graffiti around the building or grounds.
- Records of behaviour are well maintained and show that for most pupils the number of incidents of unacceptable behaviour drops significantly. Fixed-term and permanent exclusions have declined. Records are monitored for trends which help staff to identify where specific action or more training may be needed.
- Attendance has improved and the primary age pupils attend at least as well as pupils in primary schools nationally. Most secondary age pupils attend regularly and their attendance is better than at their previous schools. Staff are determined to see that pupils gain the maximum benefit from what the school offers them. They monitor attendance rigorously at school and at alternative placements. They work hard with pupils and parents where there are difficulties. Despite this, they have been less successful at improving the attendance of disadvantaged boys.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Pupils usually join The Woodlands with knowledge and skills which are below, and often well below, those of their peers in mainstream schools. This is usually because pupils' progress has been affected by poor attendance, in some cases compounded by exclusions, leading to gaps in their knowledge.
- From the beginning of the primary phase, interesting activities are carefully matched to individual needs so pupils learn the basics of English and mathematics in a similar way to their peers in mainstream settings. Links between the work set across a number of subjects helps to successfully develop their skills; for example the youngest pupils were practising their writing skills through writing instructions for an activity in art.
- In key stage 2 reading, writing and mathematics continue to have a high priority. Games and timed challenges are used well to encourage pupils to develop reasoning and mathematical skills. Books are carefully chosen to engage pupils' interest but also to challenge them to read at a higher level and develop a wider vocabulary.
- Most pupils in key stage 3 make good progress, particularly in reading, but also in writing and mathematics. This means that when they return to mainstream school or move to a school more suited to their particular needs, they can cope better with the demands of the curriculum. They have also developed better personal and social skills, which help their learning.
- Many pupils who join the school in key stage 4 have made comparatively little progress in previous years. Most of them start to make good progress both in the school-based provision and on their placements.

Almost all pupils leave with recognised qualifications in English and mathematics as well as vocational qualifications. In the current Year 11, a good proportion of pupils are on track to achieve a grade C or better in GCSE English examinations.

- The most able pupils are set challenging targets based on good knowledge and understanding of their potential. For example, in key stage 4, the evidence from pupils' books shows that the most able pupils are able to write at length and in depth, showing an increasingly mature understanding of different topics.
- Very good relationships ensure that pupils learn well and make good progress. They make particularly good progress in improving their English. Progress in mathematics is not quite as good, partly because the school has not had specialist mathematics teachers but mainly because pupils lack confidence in their knowledge and skills. There has also, until relatively recently, been less of a focus on mathematics.
- Boys and girls, those with particular learning difficulties and those looked after by local authorities achieve equally well. The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and others is narrowing. The school is checking carefully that the additional funding for these pupils is being used well to provide the support they need and is helping them to make better progress. Most pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	113912
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	1002149

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	Management committee
Chair	Alison Gargan
Headteacher	Lesley Candler
Telephone number	01740 656 040
Website	www.thewoodlands.durham.sch.uk
Email address	pru@durhamlearning.net
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2013

Information about this school

- The Woodlands was previously known as Broom Cottages Pupils Referral Unit (PRU). It serves the needs of pupils aged five to 16 who have been permanently excluded from school or who are at risk of permanent exclusion.
- The school operates on three sites in County Durham. Secondary age pupils attend The Elms, The Maples or Turnaround on the same site as the previous PRU. Primary age pupils attend The Willows or The Beeches which are located in two primary schools, one adjacent to the secondary site and one situated some distance away in order to serve a different area of the county. The Willows opened in September 2105 and the Beeches opened in April 2016.
- The school currently has over 150 pupils on roll, most of whom have special educational needs or disabilities due to their social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage, with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Pupils in the primary and key stage 3 provision are normally on short-term placements, typically 12 weeks for key stage 3 and one or two terms for key stages 1 and 2. The aim is for them to return to mainstream school or move to more specialist provision if appropriate. Key stage 4 pupils generally stay longer to enable them to take GCSE examinations and other qualifications.
- Most pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding. This is additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils eligible for free school meals and for children looked after by the local authority.
- About half of the pupils in key stage 4 attend a range of alternative provision for all or part of their time at the PRU. These institutions currently include Box Clever and Ponyworld.
- The school has gone through a period of staffing difficulties and for about half of the time since the previous inspection had an acting leadership team. The headteacher has been in post since April 2015 and the management committee was reconstituted in September 2015 when the school was relaunched. An experienced school leader has been supporting the school as acting deputy headteacher and a permanent appointment has been made for September 2016.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed work in all classes in the primary bases and in most subjects in the secondary phase. An inspector also visited a sample of the alternative providers used by the school.
- Joint lesson observations were undertaken with members of the leadership team. The inspection team also examined the quality of work in the books of pupils from across the school.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of documentation including safeguarding documentation, procedures to check the quality of teaching as well as the school's system for checking pupils' progress, curriculum plans and management committee records.
- The team held meetings with pupils, senior leaders, members of the school staff, the chair and other members of the management committee and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors met two parents and spoke on the telephone to another parent.
- Though no parents made their views known on the online questionnaire (Parent View) the team had access to a recent school survey of parental views and pupils' attitudes.

Inspection team

Grace Marriott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Ann Muxworthy

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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