

Woodlands Community College

Minstead Avenue, Harefield, Southampton SO18 5FW

Inspection dates

12–13 July 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Requires improvement |
| Outcomes for pupils | Requires improvement |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils underachieve in mathematics, science and a few other subjects. Despite some improvement, overall GCSE results are predicted to be below average in 2016.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make less progress than other pupils.
- Some middle leaders are new to their roles and have not yet established consistently good learning and progress in their subjects.
- The school struggles to improve attendance. The proportion of persistent absentees is well above that seen nationally.
- Learning is slow when teachers give pupils work that is too easy or too difficult for them or do not challenge them to think and reflect on problems or issues.
- The percentage of high GCSE grades is very low in some subjects, especially for the most able pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- In just five terms, the headteacher has generated an improving school where staff and pupils enjoy working and most pupils behave well.
- The headteacher has successfully tackled poor teaching, improved behaviour and restructured the senior and middle leadership teams.
- The governing body has moved into a higher gear in the last two years. Members fully back the headteacher but interrogate her and senior leaders to be confident the school is improving.
- One parent noted that 'the school has made so much effort to change the mind-set of the community'. This is true; parents are increasingly involved with their children's education.
- The care and support for pupils with health and learning needs is sensitive and helpful. Pupils' welfare has a high priority and they feel safe.
- In the majority of subjects, pupils who attend well achieve well, particularly in history and in English and technology subjects.
- In many subjects, teachers give pupils constructive feedback on their work so they know how to improve it.
- The curriculum is good. Leaders make sure that pupils' horizons are widened by blending in a strong focus on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and an understanding of British values. Pupils are well prepared for their futures.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase attendance, by:
 - extending and diversifying the strategies used to reduce the number of persistent absentees and those whose attendance is erratic, particularly in Years 10 and 11
 - further reducing the number of fixed term exclusions.

- Improve achievement, by:
 - intensifying the focus on pupils achieving at least the expected levels of progress in mathematics and science and on disadvantaged pupils' progress
 - clarifying pupils' starting points to underpin precise targets so that underachievement by classes and groups of pupils is identified and tackled as early as possible
 - increasing the percentage of high GCSE grades by raising expectations of what pupils, especially the most able, can achieve.

- Transform teaching and learning by spreading the best practice that already exists, by:
 - making sure that teachers, particularly in science and mathematics, know how to extend pupils' reasoning and problem-solving so they acquire confidence and competence in subject content and skills
 - sharing the high-quality practice that exists in terms of challenge and preparation of resources
 - making sure that pupils appreciate the relevance and importance of work to their present and future lives.

- Strengthen leadership and management, by:
 - giving all middle leaders the support they need to lead efficiently and effectively and insisting that they have schemes of work which generate high-quality learning
 - developing the experience of the senior leadership team to tackle their roles and improve learning
 - ensuring consistency in the application of key policies such as marking and feedback
 - sharpening the improvement plan so it has more precise and dated targets by which to assess whether pupils are making enough progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher spent her first two terms in post, six months before Year 11 sat their GCSEs in 2015, confronting the school's financial deficit. This was partly resolved by reducing the number of staff. Often, with no applicants for advertised posts, the headteacher, when possible, replaced ineffective middle leaders with experienced members of staff and created new, larger faculties. Most of these changes were in place by September 2015. However, some middle leaders, especially in mathematics and science, have not yet overcome the weak teaching and inefficiency gaps in the past such as poorly planned schemes of work. These elements of leadership require improvement but they show signs of being tackled.
- The headteacher can be proud of what she has achieved in less than two years at the helm. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is now predominantly good and many of them are keen to learn. The headteacher has improved the effectiveness of marking, helped pupils to be more confident and ambitious and helped teachers to understand that they are accountable for pupils' progress. Despite lack of success, the headteacher's determination to improve attendance has been resolute.
- Members of the senior leadership team have only been in post this year but, as they gather experience and wisdom in their roles, the momentum of the work they do has an increasingly positive influence on improving teaching and tackling underachievement. Fully supported by the governing body and staff, the headteacher has established a culture of ambition and an atmosphere where pupils feel happy and secure. The school is already in a higher gear and poised to move forward fast.
- Senior leaders know exactly which areas of the school's work require improvement. Nevertheless, the school's improvement plan, as noted during a monitoring visit, is still not sharp enough. It does not have precise, dated targets against which pupils' progress can be checked regularly. Similarly, leaders do not focus enough on what pupils are learning, concentrating more on what teachers are doing, when they evaluate the quality of teaching and learning.
- Over four out of five staff who responded to the questionnaire feel that the school has improved 'a lot' since its previous inspection and practically all of them are proud to work at the school; they all feel they know what the school is aiming to achieve. One factor behind staff's high morale is the good, professional development they receive and the external advice provided through belonging to a strong teaching alliance of local schools. Staff meet regularly to share ideas and resources.
- Pupil premium funds are spent wisely and thoughtfully on emotional literacy support assistants, equipment and music lessons or membership of an external organisation for the most able. These actions have improved disadvantaged pupils' progress but not enough to eradicate the progress gaps between them and other pupils. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is proving hard to improve. Catch-up funds contribute to the staff who deliver intensive literacy and numeracy programmes. From September 2016, a primary-trained teacher will provide extra input on reading and numeracy.
- In response to pupils needing to strengthen their English and mathematics skills, in addition to lessons in these subjects, leaders have wisely arranged 20 minutes of reading or numeracy every day. They have maintained the curriculum's breadth imaginatively in response to the small number of pupils. Pupils choose and study a performing arts subject intensively in Year 9 and Years 10 and 11 learn some key stage 4 option subjects together, making group sizes viable.
- Leaders are carefully selecting future key stage 4 courses, including technical awards, to match pupils' abilities and aspirations. A 'curious minds' programme and other activities for the most able pupils, trips and visits and well-attended extra-curricular activities all enrich pupils' experiences, often beyond their local community. Pupils are involved with local events and charity activities.
- Creative curriculum days held three times a year foster cross-curricular projects on a wide range of topics and support the school's strong focus on exploring British values and preparing pupils well for life in modern Britain. Year 11 pupils articulate what democracy or the rule of law mean and older ones define extremism and radicalisation realistically. All pupils now study religious education, which underpins the school's good provision for their knowledge and reflection on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.
- Staff work tirelessly to involve parents in their child's education, particularly where there are attendance or health issues. The special educational needs coordinator and inclusion unit staff know all these individual pupils' learning and personal needs in detail. Colourful newsletters, information and celebration events and regular contact by email or telephone keep parents fully informed about school life.

■ The governance of the school

- The chair of the governing body feels that members' resolute determination and their wise headteacher appointment are what have moved the school forward. Records of governing body minutes show that members keep a sharp eye on policies and practice, especially related to pupils' safety and well-being. They unpick information about pupils' progress, especially those who are disadvantaged, and ask probing questions about this and other issues.
- The local authority has provided useful, practical support in recent months. Governors and senior leaders are pleased that the school is likely to join the Hamwic Academy Trust in the future.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff have assimilated the most recent documents they must be familiar with, including those related to the 'Prevent' duty and pupils' health, and training is regular and comprehensive. Consequently, pupils feel very safe and secure and they also know how to manage risk and stay safe online. All policies and procedures are up to date and checked by governors. The school has well-established links with several external support agencies but staff struggle to get the rapid response to the volume of support they seek. A number of requests for pupils to be assessed for education, health and care plans have yet to be completed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Pockets of poor learning and achievement in the past, not fully eradicated in mathematics, science and a few other subjects, are why teaching requires improvement. Overseeing these subjects, senior and middle leaders have already started to improve the quality of teaching. They have generated better progress in all years but, with much ground to cover, this has yet to be reflected in GCSE results.
- Teachers do not regularly ask questions which deepen and extend pupils' understanding or check whether they have understood work in order to identify and address misconceptions quickly. In mathematics particularly, but also relevant to other subjects, the important skills of problem-solving and reasoning are not developed regularly or consistently. Examples of challenging questions were seen in history and in English, where Year 7 pupils had to write a fairy tale to explain current issues in society.
- Over time, pupils are not challenged enough in their learning if all groups of pupils do exactly the same work without consideration that some of them may find it too easy or too difficult. During the inspection it was clear that the work teachers planned did not consistently involve careful reflection of pupils' progress. Nevertheless, leaders now expect all teachers to prepare information about the classes they teach where they must identify underachievers and highlight groups such as disadvantaged, boys and girls or the most able, as needed. This is improving staff awareness of different groups of pupils' needs.
- In a recent report to governors, the headteacher noted that 'there is still too much lecture style teaching' which she wishes to reduce so that pupils have time to discuss their thoughts and share their understanding. Neither do pupils learn enthusiastically if they cannot appreciate the relevance of work to the world beyond the classroom. Ploughing through endless speed calculations and not even discussing, for example, how tennis serves exceed motorway speed limits, does not make for enjoyable learning.
- There is clear evidence of pockets of highly effective teaching over time which pupils describe enthusiastically. The resources prepared for history lessons are stimulating, varied and challenge pupils to think. Preparation for tests and GCSE examinations is meticulous, well-structured and builds pupils' confidence so they achieve very well. Such effective practice is already being shared among teachers and needs to continue.
- All teachers know they are responsible for developing pupils' writing and reading and most remember to emphasise new subject-specific words and to guide the structure of paragraphs. The headteacher's determination that marking must be worthwhile and useful is encapsulated in the school's policy. This has been taken on board by most teachers. Books show that in line with the expected policy, the best marking tells pupils clearly what they have done well and poses good questions based on what could be better; practically all pupils respond thoughtfully. As yet, this is not consistent in all subjects and years.
- Pupils at risk of exclusion of who find mainstream school difficult study in the inclusion unit. Experienced support staff address their health, behavioural and emotional needs at the same time as focusing on basic skills; they progress well. However, in a room for those whose behaviour has lapsed, learning is not consistently effective because they are not always given enough work to do.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. With many pupils (one in ten this academic year) receiving support for mental health issues from external agencies, the school does everything possible to nurture pupils' well-being and to support their parents. A parent wrote that 'my child has blossomed' and another that 'staff are always available'. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils are very strong, creating a community spirit which pupils value.
- Elements within assemblies, personal development sessions and cross-curricular activities all guide pupils to lead safe and healthy lives, to know about physical and emotional well-being and to understand the dangers of certain lifestyles. Members of the school council mentioned an assembly on organ donation, an example of broadening pupils' understanding of others' health needs.
- Sports awards encourage all pupils to take an active role in physical education and Year 7 observed that 'you do not have to be a sports fanatic'.
- Year 9 pupils described a personal development session when they made presentations to others about the 'use of language and jokes'. They added that a recent assembly reinforced that the school makes a 'big deal of anti-bullying', as it does for anti-discrimination and equality for all. Responding to the questionnaire, a member of staff described how the school's 'response to incidents of aggressive language is excellent'. Pupils learn about the many different forms of bullying, such as homophobic or racist, particularly in terms of social media and e-safety. All pupils met during the inspection believe bullying is rare and unacceptable.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. This is because the attendance of a significant minority of pupils is too low. Staff battle on to try and turn around poor attendance because it significantly reduces pupils' progress. Year 11 pupils who attended for more than 90% of the year achieved far better outcomes than others overall and in English and mathematics in 2015.
- The education welfare officer works hard to get pupils into school and the attendance officer makes numerous visits to homes. Unfortunately, requested actions by local authority and other services are not forthcoming, so the school's hard work is not supported and the improvements it seeks do not happen. Pupils mentioned that attendance features regularly in assemblies.
- In assembly, pupils' behaviour can be exemplary and in class most of them behave well, concentrate and take their learning seriously. Many, but not all, take care of the presentation of their work. Nevertheless, the headteacher's firm stance on low-level disruption in lessons, not yet fully eliminated, generated a rise in fixed term exclusions. The number has begun to drop, especially in Years 7 to 9. Some Year 7 pupils said that 'disruption doesn't affect learning too much'.
- There is a programme of activities for tutor time, including the 'voting voice' on certain topics. Talking to pupils however, it did not appear that all tutors follow the programme or make the most of this daily, 20-minute session.

Outcomes for pupils require improvement

- Overall GCSE achievement has been well below average since the previous inspection. It is predicted to improve a little in 2016 but still requires improvement, especially in science and mathematics; progress in these subjects has not been good enough. In several subjects, very few pupils achieve A*/A grades. This reflects the fact that, until this year, the most able pupils have rarely tackled work and experienced the style of learning that would generate these high grades.
- In addition to mathematics and science, Year 11 pupils have not made enough progress between Years 7 and 11 in geography, information technology, media studies, French and Spanish. These subjects are no longer being taught or have new leadership in place or arranged for September 2016.
- The gaps between disadvantaged pupils making the expected progress and other pupils in the school have yet to narrow to single percentage figures in mathematics, though they came closer in 2015. The gap in English did not decrease in 2015 but is predicted to narrow considerably in 2016. In both English and mathematics the few most able, disadvantaged pupils are not close to matching the progress made by the same pupils nationally.

- In contrast, in 2015 pupils made the expected progress in English and almost two thirds of them attained above the national percentage of A* to C grades. One third of pupils who took history exceeded the national percentage of A*/A grades. In half the other subjects taken in 2015, including English literature, technology and most of the performing arts subjects, an above average percentage of pupils attained A* to C grades. In all years, pupils continue to make at least good progress in these subjects.
- If mathematics results had not been so low, the percentage of pupils attaining five good GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2015 would have been above average. Also, the school's GCSE results do not reveal any of the factors contributing to a significant number of key stage 4 pupils underachieving since the previous inspection. The figures below in brackets are for Year 11 in 2015:
 - The proportions of pupils (just below 50%) whose attendance falls below 90% or who miss half or more of their schooling (nine) are much higher than national figures. An above average proportion, over 70%, of those who attended well achieved five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics in 2015. The same figure including the persistent absentees drops to 41%.
 - The pupil population is far less stable than in most secondary schools as almost one in five pupils enter the school after Year 7. The school does its best to prepare pupils for GCSE when they arrive during Years 10 and 11 (15%) but these pupils often have gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
 - Several pupils in key stage 4 (one in five), most of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities, have significant mental health and emotional needs and/or challenging domestic situations. These reduce their ability to learn and to participate in school life; they made poor progress in 2015.
- Progress has improved this year, especially in Years 7 to 9, with better teaching, intensification of support for disadvantaged pupils, greater awareness of the most able pupils and perseverance to improve attendance by all pupils, particularly those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The various programmes to improve reading are effective and far more pupils now read fluently and for pleasure. The headteacher appreciates that widening pupils' comprehension is equally important. In addition, pupils in Years 7 to 9 particularly are making better progress in mathematics and science and in subjects such as geography where progress was not strong in the past.
- A further sign of the school's improving work is the prediction that all Year 11 pupils have plans for their future education, employment or training which was not the case in 2015. Nearly 30 pupils took either construction or applied engineering and achieved good GCSE results in 2015 – valuable qualifications for their futures.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 116465 |
| Local authority | Southampton |
| Inspection number | 10012293 |

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

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|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 568 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Susan Blatchford |
| Headteacher | Toni Sambrook |
| Telephone number | 02380 463303 |
| Website | www.woodlands.southampton.sch.uk |
| Email address | info@woodlands.southampton.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 11–12 June 2014 |

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in January 2015, just over six months after the previous inspection.
- The school is smaller than the average sized 11–16 school.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium is well above average and increasing. The pupil premium is funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for children looked after.
- A number of Year 7 pupils receive catch-up funding which is for those who did not achieve level 4 in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of primary school.
- Over 80% of pupils are of White British heritage with very small numbers from several minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- The school's inclusion unit, situated in the community wing rather than in the main school, provides short-term, alternative provision for up to eight pupils in each key stage. It has the specific aim of supporting re-integration back into mainstream lessons. On rare occasions, pupils attend full-time alternative educational provision at the Polygon or Compass schools.
- In 2015, the school met the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of information on its website.
- In June 2016, representatives of the Hamwic Trust carried out a due diligence review of Woodlands Community College. An expression of interest has been forwarded to the Department for Education and the regional schools commissioner. The review recommended that once the school's financial commitments have been re-organised, it should be 'welcomed into the Trust's multi-academy structure'.

Information about this inspection

- The school was informed about the inspection several hours later than usual as there was a problem contacting the school the day before the inspection started.
- On the second day of the inspection, the school held its sports day so no lessons took place. Inspectors spent the first day observing lessons and carried out other inspection activities on the second day.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in about 30 part-lessons. Several lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. In practically all lessons, inspectors looked at pupils' work in books and on the second day they examined a wide selection of pupils' books.
- During the first day of the inspection, inspectors talked informally to pupils and met with groups of pupils, including school council members. The lead inspector met the director of standards who led the due diligence review for the Hamwic Trust. On the second day, discussions were held with staff including pastoral and academic senior and middle leaders. Meetings were held with the chair of the governing body and three other governors and with Southampton local authority's principal officer for education and the school improvement officer.
- Inspectors took account of 39 parents' responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and 27 written comments submitted by parents. Inspectors also considered responses to online questionnaires completed by 63 members of staff and 73 completed by pupils. An inspector met a small group of parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included the school's evaluation of its performance, action plan for 2015/2016, standards and progress information, behaviour and attendance records and a range of policies. Inspectors read The Hamwic Trust's due diligence review and other external reports on the school's progress.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Clare Gillies, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Ian Tustian | Ofsted Inspector |
| Caroline Walshe | Ofsted Inspector |

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