School report

Woodlands School

Woodlands Approach, Basildon, Essex SS16 5BA

Inspection dates 7–8 March 2018

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	**Outstanding**
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	**Good**
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	**Good**
Outcomes for pupils	**Good**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Outstanding leadership has changed the culture of the school. The acceptance of low achievement and low aspirations has been replaced by one of pupils pursuing excellence.
- The highly effective headteacher has galvanised staff. They are now a cohesive group who are dedicated and passionate about improving pupils' life chances.
- Governors provide support and challenge highly effectively to oversee the continued raising of standards across the school.
- Pupils behave well. Their personal development and welfare is outstanding. They display extremely positive attitudes to learning.
- Teaching is consistently good. In some areas, teachers' high-quality planning, incisive questioning and secure subject knowledge enable pupils to make rapid progress.
- The relationships between staff and pupils are a real strength. Pupils are extremely well cared for. They work hard and make good progress.
- The school continues to work closely with parents and carers and the local community to secure even better outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders' actions and effective staff training programme have led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching.
- Pupils make good progress over time because they work hard and are well taught.
- Leaders use the additional funding well to ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities make good progress.
- Leaders review the curriculum regularly. The extensive extra-curricular programme, including the elite sports programme, is broad and meet pupils' interests and needs very well.
- Leaders have secured improvements in pupils' attendance. However, overall attendance remains below national, and the persistent absenteeism of some groups remain high.
- A few least and most-able pupils could achieve more if teachers' work was matched more precisely to their needs.
- Leaders have overseen improvements in some key subject areas. Leaders acknowledge that the published results for these subjects need to be better than historical figures.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate the improvements in teaching and learning by ensuring that teachers plan lessons that consistently stretch and challenge the least and most-able pupils, so they consistently make the progress of which they are capable.
- Improve outcomes by building on the improvements seen in humanities, modern foreign languages and mathematics and ensuring that these are reflected in national progress measures.
- Raise attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism for all pupils, but particularly for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding

- Leaders and governors have guided staff through turbulent times while overseeing significant improvements. One member of staff described the atmosphere at the school previously as 'like walking into a bereavement'. Through their relentless insistence on raising standards, leaders have created a culture where staff and pupils strive to achieve and no longer accept that low expectation, low aspiration and low achievement are predicated by postcode.
- The headteacher has galvanised staff. He has ensured that the focus is on raising aspirations at all levels. Staff are dedicated and ensure that the high-quality care they provide creates a nurturing environment that supports pupils extremely well. One parent, whose view echoes the sentiment of many, said: 'The school is very welcoming and approachable to both parents and pupils. My children are doing very well academically because staff support them and encourage the best results out of them.'
- Leaders' comprehensive monitoring of pupils' progress and attainment gives them accurate, instant information on how well pupils are doing. This allows them to provide additional support if pupils fall behind.
- Senior leaders undertake frequent and systematic checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their online system, which records their 10-minute unannounced observations, shows that nearly 600 visits to classrooms have been made since September. This gives leaders a clear picture of the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum.
- Leaders ensure that the additional government funding is used effectively. Spending is carefully targeted through a clear strategic plan, with effective monitoring and evaluation that holds staff to account. Pupil premium funding is securing further improvements in the progress of disadvantaged pupils, both socially and academically. Academic progress for Year 11 disadvantaged pupils over the last two years has been broadly in line with that of all pupils nationally, while the proportion of disadvantaged pupils encouraged to take part in the school play increased significantly.
- The management of teachers' performance is rigorous and fair. Teachers' targets link to school improvement priorities and teachers' own professional development. Leaders ensure that teachers' pay progression relates closely to how well their pupils achieve.
- There are regular opportunities for staff to develop professionally. Staff spoke about the value of the training, highlighting the peer-to-peer groups, the focus on mastery and the work in groups of three as being particularly effective in helping them to develop their practice further. Newly qualified teachers speak glowingly about the support they receive from colleagues across the curriculum. They feel that staff go 'above and beyond to help them become good teachers'.
- The broad curriculum has been carefully designed to meet the needs of a diverse intake and engage and motivate pupils. A large number of pupils follow the EBacc options linked to the school's high aspirations for all of its pupils.
- The curriculum is extended very effectively by a broad range of clubs and after-school activities. The Elite Player Development sports programme, involving 175 pupils,

includes football, rugby, basketball, dance and netball, as well as a disability sports programme. The many links with other schools and organisations help broaden pupils' horizons. The extensive sporting programme, alongside trips to universities, help to foster team spirit and raise aspiration. The highly popular breakfast club ensures that pupils arrive promptly and attend classes ready to learn. Pupils say that the extra-curricular activities are well run and help them to develop different skills across a range of areas.

- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities have their needs met well. Staff have a very good knowledge of pupils' needs. Transition arrangements for pupils new to the school, and ongoing support for current pupils, are precise to ensure that pupils' needs are met quickly and effectively. The good progress that pupils make is recorded in their learning passports.
- The school's two specialist resource bases support pupils with particular needs well. Performance information reveals the positive impact that this provision has on pupils who access it. For pupils who have education, health and care plans, the speech and language therapy gives them the skills to access the curriculum and function in everyday life more easily.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and willingly engage visitors in conversation. They hold open doors for you, treat each other with courtesy and respect, and are tolerant of others' ideas and viewpoints. Pupils have a clear understanding of British values and talked articulately about how democracy can keep us safe and the dangers of radicalisation.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is developed very successfully. Inspectors noted the high-quality discussion work in different areas linked to Nelson Mandela, and to women's rights on International Women's Day.

Governance of the school

- Governors and trustees have been instrumental in driving significant improvements. They bring a wide range of essential experiences and desirable skills that give them an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. They are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development and ensure that leaders have robust plans in place to secure further improvements. They receive regular updates on progress as a result of leaders' comprehensive monitoring processes.
- Governors are very 'hands on'. They all know the journey the school has been on and continue to challenge leaders to demonstrate the impact of their actions. They are prepared to have those 'thorny discussions' when they feel standards could be improved.
- Importantly, through the many changes that have taken place, governors have maintained the community focus. The school is held in high regard locally, as seen by the very high positive figures in Parent View.
- Governors ensure that they meet all their statutory responsibilities.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

- The school is an inclusive community where safeguarding is given a very high profile and pupils' welfare and safety are paramount. All safeguarding arrangements are robust and rigorous. Staff are appropriately trained; they register concerns well and these are handled appropriately and promptly. Case files are detailed and record information accurately. Staff work effectively with external agencies, and governors are kept up to date about safeguarding matters.
- Governors monitor the school's safeguarding processes to ensure that these are robust. They make sure that all the required checks are carried out to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.
- Staff, pupils and parents all agree overwhelmingly that there is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school that allows pupils to feel safe. Staff make good use of lessons, tutor times and assemblies to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when using social media. Pupils are alert to the dangers attached to extremism and radicalisation.
- The school site is safe and secure.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment — Good

- In line with other areas within the school, the culture within learning has changed. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve have risen. Pupils enjoy learning, can talk about the progress they make, and respond well to the increasing difficulty of the work because they are taught well.
- Strengths are clearly evident in English, science, drama and physical education. Inspectors noted teachers guiding pupils in lessons exceptionally well on how to develop their understanding. In science, Year 9 pupils were able to confidently explain the process of photosynthesis, while in English, pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of aspects of language, structure, imagery and literary techniques in 'Macbeth' and 'Romeo and Juliet'.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to explain difficult concepts well, and ensure that pupils are familiar with the correct technical terminology. Pupils avoid common pitfalls because teachers highlight common misconceptions and guide them skilfully through challenging concepts.
- Where practice is most effective, it was characterised by teachers planning work to meet the needs of all pupils. Teachers' knowledge of what pupils know and can do means that the work is sufficiently challenging. In this way, pupils develop a deeper understanding of the work covered.
- The strong relationships that exist between pupils and teachers are a common feature of the school. Teachers expect pupils to behave well and work hard. The departmental behaviour for learning policies, and staff training, ensure that good behaviour is achieved through humour, respect and courtesy.
- Teachers use a range of activities and learning styles to capture pupils' interests. Teachers skilfully involve pupils in a range of quick-fire questions and instant surveys to help them maintain their focus and high levels of concentration.
- Teachers use questioning well. Where practice was strongest, teachers use questioning

to probe pupils' understanding, elicit more information, keep pupils focused, and adapt learning to address any misconceptions. Teachers frequently asked 'how', 'why' or 'explain' to help pupils achieve more, by insisting that they answer questions in more detail.

- Progress mentors are used effectively to support pupils. Inspectors noted a range of useful strategies being used to support pupils' learning. Staff are very active in their support of individuals and adapt resources for pupils with personal challenges to help them make good progress from their starting points.
- The quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, modern foreign languages and humanities, has improved. The most effective teaching provides pupils with a range of interesting tasks that demand full concentration and deep thought. In mathematics, the increased levels of challenge and teachers' focused questioning ensure that pupils explain their reasoning and so deepen their understanding.
- Teachers use information about pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to support them to learn well. Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make progress in line with other pupils nationally with similar starting points.
- Although teaching is now consistently good, some pupils do not make the more rapid progress of which they are capable. This is because teachers do not always pitch activities at a level to stretch and challenge these pupils. Leaders are aware of these inconsistencies and have plans in place to ensure that teachers' planning is more precisely matched to the needs of some least- and most-able pupils.
- Most teachers work effectively to support pupils' understanding. However, a few teachers do not always address errors precisely enough. Where this happens, pupils continue to make the same mistakes, which prevents them from making better progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff know their pupils very well. Strong relationships are forged between staff and pupils, built on trust and mutual respect. Staff support pupils extremely well to help them develop academically and socially.
- The school is a highly inclusive place to learn. Staff say that there is no apparent hierarchy. All staff and pupils are treated equally. Leaders and staff deal with pupils' behaviour calmly, effectively and systematically. There have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions in the last three years.
- The school caters very effectively for the welfare and personal development of pupils with additional needs through its resource-based provision. The specialist support, early identification of need, and close and productive partnerships with parents lead to very positive outcomes for the pupils.
- The school has a significant number of vulnerable pupils. Staff work closely and highly effectively with other agencies to ensure that pupils receive the help that they need. Staff are tenacious in their follow-up if they feel that referrals are taking too long.

- Staff have comprehensive support systems in place to ensure that children who are looked after are safe and supported well.
- Pupils feel safe at school. Ninety-six percent of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, said that their children felt safe at school. The school's work to help pupils stay safe is highly effective.
- Pupils do not tolerate bullying; as such, it is very rare. On the few occasions it does take place, pupils are confident that staff will help them and resolve the matter quickly and effectively.
- Pupils from all year groups could talk about the strengths of the comprehensive careers programme. Careers guidance advisers work with all pupils to ensure that they have firm plans for the future, helping pupils to achieve their goals.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils like coming to school and are proud to be members of the school community. They move about a large site in a very orderly and purposeful way. This is because the staff supervise them well and pupils respect staff's expectations.
- Displays are neat and tidy. The site is well maintained and virtually free of litter.
- Pupils are very polite and courteous to visitors. They willingly engage in conversation, they are friendly, and they hold open doors for visitors.
- Leaders' clear management and systematic recording of behavioural issues has led to an improvement in pupils' behaviour year on year. Leaders' effective use of managed moves and the internal isolation unit has ensured that there have been no fixed-term or permanent exclusions in the last three years.
- Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully. While the current attendance figure for all pupils is below the national figure, leaders' actions have led to improvements. The attendance of different groups of pupils has improved from last year. However, leaders have identified that the persistent absenteeism of a few groups, especially those pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, is still too high. Leaders have recently appointed a further two members of staff, to work specifically with some hard-to-reach families to try to secure further improvements.

Outcomes for pupils — Good

- On entry to the school, pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics are significantly below the national figures. In 2016 and 2017, Year 11 pupils' overall progress, for all prior attainment groups, has been significantly above or broadly in line with other pupils nationally.
- Outcomes for pupils continue to improve. The proportion of pupils obtaining a good pass in English and mathematics is on an upward trend. In recent years, results have been the highest since the school became an academy. The evidence seen on inspection, and the school's own information, indicate that this year's results will rise significantly again and surpass national figures.

- Results from previous years show that pupils in English and science, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well. This is due to the high-quality teaching and support pupils receive in lessons and through additional catch-up sessions. In a recent survey, pupils said that English teachers in particular give extremely effective guidance on how to improve their work.
- Leaders' effective spending of additional funding helps disadvantaged students and those who have SEN and/or disabilities to achieve well. Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points because they receive good support that is effectively monitored and coordinated so that it meets their needs well.
- School leaders have an accurate picture of where pupils achieve well and where actions are needed to improve outcomes further. Over the past two years, the progress that pupils have made in humanities, modern foreign languages, and to some extent mathematics, has not matched those in other subject areas. Leaders have brought about considerable improvements in teaching and planning that have seen improved progress for pupils across all age ranges. The work in pupils' books, and the school's current information, show that the current Year 11 pupils are on course to achieve at a far higher level. Leaders acknowledge that these improvements need to be seen in published results.
- Inspectors looked closely at the work of current pupils. Their analysis shows that pupils make good progress across a broad range of subjects. In English, science and technology, pupils' progress is particularly strong.
- Leaders work closely with alternative providers to provide additional opportunities for a small number of pupils. Leaders monitor their attendance and progress closely. Pupils who access alternative provision make good progress.
- Leaders have worked hard to raise pupils' aspirations. Staff provide high-quality careers information, advice and guidance that helps the vast majority of pupils to move on to further education, employment or training.
- Leaders use catch-up funding effectively. Pupils who join the school in Year 7 with very low levels of literacy and numeracy receive additional support. This support is effective in helping most of them to catch up so that they can access the curriculum successfully.
- The school prepares pupils well for when they leave school. Last year, almost all pupils secured a place in either further education, employment or training.
- Some high prior-attaining pupils have not achieved as well as others. The improvements in teaching and learning are showing improved outcomes for these pupils currently in the school. However, leaders are aware that this is an area for continued focus.

School details

Unique reference number	141214
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10041736

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1477
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Terry Reynolds
Headteacher	Simon Cox
Telephone number	01268 282146
Website	http://woodlandsschool.org/
Email address	woodlands@woodlandsschool.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- This was the first inspection since the school became a converter academy in April 2015, as part of a multi-academy trust, alongside another local secondary school.
- The school is a larger than average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is significantly above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average, although the proportion who have an education, health and care plan is significantly above the national average.
- The school's deprivation indicator is in the highest quintile nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is below the national average.

- The school uses Circles Trade, Circles Farm, BEP Group and Rallysport Engineering as Alternative Provision for a very small number of pupils.
- Pupils are predominantly of White British heritage.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out 56 observations, some of which were joint observations with senior leaders, across all year groups and in a wide range of subjects. They also visited tutor group sessions and attended an assembly.
- Inspectors looked carefully at pupils' work, and talked to pupils, both formally and informally, from different year groups to discuss their experience of the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the executive headteacher, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, newly qualified teachers, staff, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- An inspector held telephone conversations with staff from the alternative provision units the school uses.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including safeguarding records, case studies, attendance records, self-evaluation summaries, the school improvement plan and current assessment information.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 14 pupils, 64 parents who left free-text comments and 113 members of staff from the online questionnaire and considered the 133 responses on Parent View.

Inspection team

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