

# Inspection of a good school: The Woodlands

Broom Road, Ferryhill DL17 8AN

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Inspection dates:

26–27 February 2020

## **Outcome**

The Woodlands continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a school which rises to the challenge. The pupils who come here get a good deal. Often, they have reached the end of the road in their mainstream school. The Woodlands helps give them another chance.

Pupils feel well supported. They know that the staff care about them. They know that they are taught a proper curriculum. The school is good at preparing pupils for returning to mainstream education, or for completing qualifications at the school. This is because they have high expectations of pupils, whatever brought them to The Woodlands in the first place. Staff know their subjects and teach them well.

All of the pupils who spoke to inspectors said that bullying is not a problem at school. They know that the staff would sort it out if there was a problem. School deals effectively with challenging behaviour. Pupils who attend the school often have difficulty in managing their behaviour. School helps them to cope and to find better ways of managing their powerful feelings. Pupils feel safe.

The school goes the extra mile to help pupils and to support their parents and carers. It provides pupils with opportunities to rebuild their confidence and self-esteem.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have thought carefully about their curriculum. This is not an easy task. Pupils arrive at different points in the year, from a range of schools. They stay for varying periods of time. Often, they have had a disrupted experience of mainstream education. As a result, pupils usually have substantial gaps in their knowledge. However, leaders have faced this challenge head on and have put in place an effective curriculum to meet pupils' needs.

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. The large majority of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), so all aspects of the curriculum are adapted to meet their needs. This is done well.

The curriculum is focused on the basics of literacy, mathematics and science. It also includes the humanities, creative and vocational subjects. This is to prepare pupils for their return to mainstream schools. In each subject, leaders have planned topics which will be taught, and in what order. Staff use assessment effectively to check what pupils know and can do when they arrive.

At present, the curriculum in some subjects is more detailed in its planning and organisation than in others. Occasionally, the work demanded of pupils could be more aspirational. The curriculum for pupils attending alternative educational provision is well thought through and specific to pupils' needs. At times, some of the work set in alternative provision is too easy for what pupils know and can do.

Leaders have prioritised reading across the school. Leaders have created several library spaces. Pupils told inspectors that they read every day. The youngest pupils are supported with catching up in their reading through a specific phonics reading scheme. Older pupils use computer packages to help improve their reading. This is effective up to a point, but older pupils' reading skills could be boosted further.

The school caters for pupils who, at times, exhibit challenging behaviour. However, the school's policies and staff practice are effective in managing these situations. Staff are skilled in remaining calm and supporting pupils when behaviour becomes challenging. Pupils and staff told inspectors that behaviour is usually good. Pupils feel that they can get on and learn.

Leaders are proud of their pupils. They are proud to take them on educational visits, including residential. They provide pupils with opportunities to contribute to their community. This includes, for example, litter picking and running a market stall. Pupils undertake activities to support various charities, such as the Air Ambulance. Leaders use this, their wider curriculum, to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

The school is well led and managed. Leaders act with pupils' best interests at heart. The qualifications studied by pupils in the key stage 4 settings are appropriate in helping pupils get to the next stage of their education.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding vigilance at the school. Leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the safeguarding risks facing the pupils who attend the school. Staff are diligent in passing on any concerns they might have. Leaders take appropriate action in response. Leaders also monitor very closely the types of safeguarding issues which arise. They involve other agencies, such as the health service and the police, to support staff and pupils with extra safeguarding training or information.

Arrangements for checking the suitability of staff who work at the school meet requirements.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently coherently planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear from the actions that leaders have already taken, to plan the curriculum and train staff in how to deliver it, that they are in the process of bringing this about.
- Leaders use baseline assessments to identify the prior knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils. Usually, this is used well to plan and deliver a curriculum with suitably demanding work. Sometimes, however, work is not demanding enough to match the aspirations of the curriculum and pupils are set work which is too easy for them. Leaders should refine their use of assessment information to ensure that work is demanding and matches the aims of the curriculum.
- The school makes extensive use of a wide range of alternative education provision. Leaders monitor the suitability and safety of this provision with care. However, at times, the appropriateness of the work set for pupils in alternative provision is variable. Leaders should review how they quality assure the standard of work being set in alternative provision and take the necessary action to ensure that it is well matched to pupils' needs.
- Leaders have done much to prioritise the importance of reading. They have introduced a systematic approach to improving pupils' reading, from the youngest to the oldest pupils. While appropriate use is made of different computer reading packages, the older pupils who struggle with reading would benefit from additional support. Leaders should extend the use of their chosen phonics-based approach, sensitively and appropriately adapted, to the pupils in the key stage 3 and key stage 4 bases.

## **Background**

When we have judged a pupil referral unit to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 15–16 June 2016.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	113992
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10134997
<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	6 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Not applicable
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	245
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	Not applicable
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Margaret Hanratty (vice-chair)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lesley Candler
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thewoodlands.durham.sch.uk">www.thewoodlands.durham.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15–16 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school operates over five sites, known as 'bases', under the collective name 'The Woodlands'. The bases are: 'The Elms', 'The Maples', 'The Beeches', 'The Willows' and 'The Bridge'. The Willows and The Beeches are accommodated within nearby primary schools. The Bridge is accommodated in premises about 15 miles away from the other four bases.
- The school has links with a large number of alternative education providers. These are: Box Clever; Enterprise NE; Finchale; Escomb (Open Arms); Aspire; Education Plus; Cornerstone; Pinnacle; Delta Academy; NUDGE; Learning Trades; ALD Hair; Misty Blue; World; 5 Palms and Twedle Farm.

## Information about this inspection

- We met with the headteacher and other senior staff. We held meetings with leaders with responsibility for SEND, safeguarding, behaviour and pupils' personal development.
- We met representatives of the local authority and members of the school's governing body.
- We spoke with members of staff with a range of roles in school. Some of these meetings were 1:1 meetings.
- An inspector visited three of the alternative education providers used by the school.
- We conducted 'deep dives' into three subjects: English (including reading), mathematics and art. A deep dive consists of meeting the subject leader, visiting lessons in that subject accompanied by a leader, looking at pupils' books, talking to pupils about their learning and meetings with the teachers of the lessons visited.
- To check safeguarding arrangements, we reviewed the school's system for vetting staff who work at the school. We sampled pupils' case files to look at how leaders identify pupils who may be in need of help and how they put the necessary help in place. We checked what leaders do to ensure the safeguarding of pupils who attend alternative provision.
- We considered all of the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff, pupils and parents.

## Inspection team

Steve Shaw, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Penny

Ofsted Inspector

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