

Inspection of a good school: Woodlands School

Wood View Learning Community, Picklecombe Drive, Off Tamerton Foliot Road, Plymouth, Devon PL6 5ES

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 February 2023

Outcome

Woodlands School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Woodlands School is a warm, welcoming place where pupils thrive. Leaders and staff share a determination to give every pupil a voice. Promoting and developing pupils' communication skills and independence are at the heart of all the school does.

Adults care for pupils with dignity and respect. Pupils get the support they need to become more independent in their decision-making. The high expectations staff have for every pupil ensure that they achieve their goals. Parents and carers told inspectors how their children had achieved far more than they could ever have hoped for.

Pupils feel valued and safe. Relationships between staff and pupils are particularly strong. Pupils throughout the school get along well with one another. They are kind and friendly. Pupils generally behave well. Staff support pupils who find it hard to regulate their emotions effectively. Bullying is rare. If it were to happen, pupils are confident that adults would deal with it quickly.

Staff encourage children from early years through to students in the sixth form to participate in activities beyond the school gates. For example, the school runs 'Woodfest', an annual arts and music festival. This brings together pupils' families, other schools and the wider community in a celebration of creativity.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. This helps pupils to develop academically, socially and emotionally. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils' education, health and care plans are central to the curriculum pupils receive. All pupils have individualised learning programmes that support them well.

Leaders use a carefully considered assessment process. This checks small steps of pupils' progress in learning. The approach supports teachers in shaping the next steps in learning for each pupil. In most subjects, teachers and support staff use their subject knowledge effectively. This helps pupils to achieve well. However, some staff have more limited specialist subject knowledge in a few subjects. For example, in some foundation subjects, staff's understanding of how to deliver the planned curriculum is in its infancy. As a result, pupils do not build their knowledge as well as they could.

Leaders place a high priority on reading. They ensure that all pupils have opportunities to listen to a wide range of stories. Communication and language development form a thread throughout all aspects of school life. Pupils at an early stage of learning to read are well supported. Staff use their training to deliver the school's phonics programme expertly. Pupils read books that are well matched to the sounds they know. As a result, pupils become confident readers and are proud of their achievements.

Staff skilfully use a wide range of communication aids and resources. This supports pupils in developing their ability and confidence in communicating with others. Staff carefully monitor progress in communication. This gives pupils a voice and helps them make choices and to communicate with their peers.

Children in early years get off to a good start. There is a clear focus on understanding each child's specific needs. This helps staff to adapt the provision as the children begin their journey through the school. Students in the sixth form also benefit from a supportive environment. Post-16 students have individualised plans. These place an emphasis on their next steps and preparation for adulthood.

Pupils' personal development has been carefully considered. Staff encourage pupils to recognise and celebrate their different talents. Pupils develop their resilience by undertaking challenging outdoor activities during residential visits. Activities such as participation in the school choir give pupils opportunities to perform publicly. Pupils say that these help them to build their confidence.

Leaders work with staff and other professionals to meet pupils' sensory needs. Staff follow procedures for managing behaviour consistently. This ensures that there is minimal disruption in class. Pupils move around school calmly and quietly.

Leaders have implemented a well-considered programme of continuous training for staff. This provides staff with the knowledge and skills to support, and care for, pupils with complex needs. Staff work alongside other professionals, such as nurses and physiotherapists, to understand how best to meet each pupil's specific needs.

Governors know the school well. They hold leaders to account appropriately. As do the school's leaders, governors understand the importance of having well-supported, motivated staff. Staff enjoy their work and appreciate the consideration leaders give to their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with comprehensive and up-to-date safeguarding training. Staff understand their responsibilities well because of this. They know the signs that may indicate that a child might be at risk, and they act quickly. Leaders follow up concerns swiftly. They are tenacious in following up on referrals to external agencies. Leaders make suitable checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with pupils.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe when online and in the community. They understand how to raise any worries with a trusted adult.

The school has policies to raise awareness about the dangers of sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the specialist knowledge of staff is not sufficiently strong. As a result, some pupils do not progress as well as they could through the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that staff have the subject expertise needed to ensure that pupils know more and remember more in each subject.

Background

When we have judged a school 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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in December 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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

Unique reference number	113644
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	10268713
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jason Willingham
Headteacher	Andrea Hemmens
Website	www.woodlands.plymouth.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Woodlands is a special school for pupils with complex physical and sensory needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Woodlands School is part of the Wood View Learning Community. There is a secondary school and primary school on the same site.
- The school does not use alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of staff and representatives from the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke remotely to two representatives of the local authority and met with a group of parents.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in communication (including early reading), personal, social and health education, and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of safeguarding checks and referrals to the local authority. Inspectors spoke with staff about how they keep pupils safe. Inspectors also asked pupils how they learn to keep themselves safe and what to do if they have any concerns.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also took into consideration the responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Mark Burgess, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tonya Hill

Ofsted Inspector

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