

Inspection of Woodcroft School

Whitakers Way, Baldwins Hill, Loughton, Essex IG10 1SQ

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 March 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Woodcroft School is a warm and friendly place to be. Pupils are happy at school, so much so that, according to parents, they even want to attend in the school holidays. Staff are consistent in their calm approach and are highly skilled at understanding and working with pupils' needs. Pupils' behaviour is well managed so that pupils feel safe. Bullying is rare. Pupils enjoy positive and supportive relationships with staff.

All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. They follow a personalised curriculum which combines therapy with academic learning. The different curriculum pathways allow pupils to achieve well from their varying starting points. There is a strong focus on communication and developing pupils' vocabulary. Several parents commented upon how much more their child is talking now than previously. Staff support pupils who are non-verbal to communicate their needs in a variety of ways. This enables them to participate in circle time with their peers and share resources.

Pupils enjoy the use of the school's outside space and being able to climb, swing and play in the garden. They have a wide variety of opportunities to be creative and physical in the outdoors. Pupils enjoy cooking, horse riding and tending an allotment, to name but a few.

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

Leaders have strengthened the curriculum since the last inspection. Pupils now follow ambitious learning pathways. Each pathway has been carefully considered to provide small steps of learning. Teachers use a wide range of information to make sure that pupils start on the best pathway suited to them. This includes considering pupils' targets in their EHC plans. Leaders collect and check on pupils' progress via film footage, photographs, and spoken and written records.

Teachers and therapists consider carefully the development of pupils' skills in language and number. There is a sharp focus on developing vocabulary. Staff have agreed a set approach with this, such as how to use the word of the day. They build up in small stages how a pupil will talk to another person and then how to hold a conversation. Staff use a total communication approach, such as signing and using symbols in their interactions with pupils so that all can follow what is being said. There is frequent use of music, song, repetition and rhyme to help pupils focus and to reinforce key learning. Staff support pupils' learning through the use of aids, such as fidget toys and a therapy swing. Lessons are purposeful and flexible, working with the pupils' stamina and ability to concentrate.

The teaching of mathematics and reading remain strengths of the school. Staff skilfully teach pupils how to read. They have a good understanding of the best methods to help pupils retain their phonic knowledge. For those pupils who can read, they have regular one-to-one reading time with a staff member. Staff ensure that pupils read widely and that they develop over time their comprehension skills.

Pupils' personal development is a high priority. The 'world about me' curriculum ensures that pupils develop geographical and historical understanding, such as where they live and the idea of change. Leaders have improved the delivery of relationships and sex education (RSE), and personal, social and health education (PSHE). This now includes the teaching of protected characteristics. Teachers use sensory stories to deliver the curriculum content for this. The PSHE programme is well considered for secondary-age pupils. It includes thoughtful careers opportunities, such as visiting places of interest with a focus on exploring the jobs available for people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The PSHE curriculum for primary-age pupils is not as well planned. While it covers aspects such as online safety and healthy living, leaders have not given enough thought as to the wider content pupils need to know for their age. Leaders are currently reviewing this part of the curriculum.

Leaders have addressed the shortcomings of the last inspection. The recording of behaviour incidents is thorough. Staff have received training on how to deliver the improved curriculum as well as how to respond to pupils' needs. This is paying dividends. The use of physical intervention is reducing. This is because staff are pre-empting incidents and using the de-escalation guidance in the behaviour policy.

There are several new subject leaders in post. They have received some training for undertaking their role, but as yet have not yet checked how well their curriculum plans are implemented. Therefore, leaders' evaluation of the impact of the new curriculum is in the early stages.

The proprietors provide appropriate support and challenge for leaders. They seek external views to help inform their conclusions of the effectiveness of the school's work. This includes systematically checking that all the independent school standards are met and that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know pupils exceptionally well and this helps with their safeguarding duties. They receive regular training to understand how to safeguard pupils with SEND. Staff are vigilant, especially with pupils who have difficulty communicating. They pay close attention to changes in mood, behaviour and appearance. Procedures to raise concerns and follow them up systematically are in place. Staff have established good working relationships with external agencies and local authorities.

The safeguarding policy is published on the website. The proprietor maintains the single central record appropriately. Leaders have undertaken the necessary checks when appointing staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some subject leaders are new in post and have not fully discharged aspects of their roles, such as checking the implementation of the curriculum. This means that they do not have a full sense of the impact of the changes they have made. Leaders should make sure that subject leaders are supported to undertake their role fully so that they can see what is working well and what is not, including making further refinements to the curriculum as and when needed.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	115425
DfE registration number	881/6031
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10275172
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Number of part-time pupils	4
Proprietor	Woodcroft School Limited
Chair	Daniel Edwards
Headteacher	Brian Sainsbury
Annual fees (day pupils)	£62,457
Telephone number	020 8508 1369
Website	www.woodcroftschoo.net
Email address	mail@woodcroftschoo.net
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 March 2022

Information about this school

- Woodcroft is an independent special day school for pupils with complex learning and behavioural difficulties associated with varying degrees of autism spectrum disorder.
- The school is registered to admit up to 50 pupils between five and 13 years. All pupils are supported by EHC plans relating to their complex needs.
- The school is a family-run business. The two proprietors provide the governance to the school. They are supported in their quality assurance of the school by an advisory panel of education consultants.
- All pupils are referred by and funded by local authorities in and around London.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school does not currently make use of any supply staff.
- At the previous inspection carried out in March 2022, the school was judged to require improvement and several of the independent school standards were not met.
- The Department for Education required the proprietor to prepare an action plan to show how the un-met independent school standards would be addressed. The submitted action plan was evaluated on 2 August 2022 and was found to be acceptable with modifications. This standard inspection incorporated a progress monitoring inspection.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor, the headteacher, senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector held telephone conversations with representatives from the advisory panel, and Essex and Hackney local authorities.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: language and literacy (including early reading), science, PSHE and the World About Me (humanities) curriculum. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leader and spoke to staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke to the local authority designated officer. Inspectors scrutinised safeguarding records, including those related to risk assessments, health and safety checks and the safer recruitment of staff.
- Inspectors spoke to a sample of parents by telephone and took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys. Inspectors gathered the views of staff and pupils through group discussions and during social times.
- Inspectors toured the school premises, checked the school's website, and scrutinised the admissions and attendance registers and a range of other documentation to check that the school complies with the independent school standards.

The school's progress in meeting previously failed standards

- During the inspection, inspectors checked whether the school now meets the independent school standards that it was judged to have failed at its previous standard inspection in March 2022.
- The school now meets all the independent school standards.

Part 1. Quality of Education provided

Paragraph 2(1)–2(2)(a), 2(2)(d)–2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(h), 2(2)(i), 2A(1)(a), 3,3(a), 3(c)–3(g), 4

- At the time of the last inspection, leaders' intentions for the curriculum were not fully developed, the essential knowledge for teachers to teach had not been identified and teaching delivery was variable. There was not a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated. Primary-age pupils did not receive RSE and secondary-age pupils did not study careers education.
- These weaknesses have been addressed. The curriculum has clear objectives for each pathway with appropriate sequencing. Teachers have received training to deliver the curriculum. There is a consistent approach with the teaching of language and communication. There is a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated. Pupils are now in receipt of RSE and careers education.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5(b)(vi)

- This standard was not met as there was weakness in the coverage of protected characteristics in the curriculum for pupils' personal development.
- Leaders have developed the use of sensory stories to ensure that all pupils are in receipt of education regarding protected characteristics. The delivery is checked and logged by leaders.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 16, 16(a)–16(b)

- At the previous inspection, pupils' individual risk assessments lacked precise information in relation to incidents. Leaders' implementation of risk assessments did not help all pupils' behaviour to improve.
- Leaders have looked carefully at how staff identify pupils' triggers so that they can pre-empt incidents in a timelier way. Leaders have trained staff in how to record and analyse incidents so that these can be acted upon. Leaders analyse behaviour on a daily basis so that risk assessments are updated readily. Incidents of physical restraint are reducing.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- At the time of the last inspection, leaders did not systematically check on how well teachers deliver the curriculum. Leaders did not have complete oversight of the incidents and events recorded to identify and support timely improvements in pupils' behaviour. They did not accurately analyse and evaluate records to support pupils and staff.
- The curriculum development manager and assessment coordinator have undertaken lesson observations. They report regularly to the leaders and proprietors via the pupils' progress meetings. Leaders have put in place a monitoring system which ensures that timely monitoring activities occur.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tessa Holledge

His Majesty's Inspector

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