

Inspection of an outstanding school: Woodlands School

Fortyfoot Road, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 8RY

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 December 2023

Outcome

Woodlands School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Woodlands School ensures that every pupil has a voice. Pupils develop strategies which enable them to communicate their thoughts, feelings and wishes clearly and confidently. The impact on their well-being is significant. They feel safe and well cared for, knowing that their views will be heard and valued.

Visitors are welcomed by happy pupils, who are rightly proud of their school and their work. The school's calm atmosphere, caring staff, and clear routines help pupils to feel settled and comfortable. Staff expect pupils to do their best. They live up to staff's high expectations, learn well and behave exceptionally.

The difference the school makes in preparing pupils and their families for the future is profound. Pupils make remarkable progress, both academically and personally, so that the oldest pupils are fully prepared to move on to life beyond Woodlands School. One parent summed up the views of others when she said: 'This school has been life changing for my child', while another described the school as 'one in a million'.

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

The school's culture of continuous review and improvement has ensured that the curriculum has remained current, relevant, and grounded in the most up-to-date research about how pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn best. One member of staff exemplified this approach to learning saying: 'We're always moving forward and thinking continuously about what we can do to enhance learning.' The school's success and expertise in teaching pupils with SEND is reflected in the role it plays in guiding and supporting special schools in the locality and beyond.

Pupils learn an expertly adapted and broad curriculum, which is enhanced with a comprehensive range of activities and experiences, such as swimming and horse riding. The school also provides an ambitious range of trips, including residential trips in the

United Kingdom and abroad. These events are organised with great care to ensure that every pupil can participate, whatever their needs.

The school prioritises the teaching of literacy skills. One of the co-headteachers said: 'Literacy is the biggest life skill we can give to our pupils.' The school fulfils this commitment on a daily basis. The reading curriculum is tailored closely to individual pupils' needs and delivered skilfully, so that pupils are fully supported to learn well. Pupils make impressive progress in learning to read and write.

Staff develop strong relationships with pupils and a deep knowledge of their needs. They work patiently and kindly to ensure that they provide the best for each pupil. For instance, staff respond sensitively, fairly and without fuss when pupils' anxiety or frustration results in challenging behaviour, so that any disruption to learning is kept to a minimum. The youngest children are welcomed warmly into school life and settle quickly into its quiet rhythms and reassuring routines.

Adults assess pupils' learning and development continuously. Pupils' progress often comes in the form of small but significant steps forward. Every milestone, no matter how small, is recognised and celebrated with great excitement by staff and pupils alike, and rightly so. Leaders have taken highly effective action to improve attendance since the pandemic. As a result, attendance rates have steadily improved and are now back to pre-pandemic levels. The school sets ambitious aims and strives to ensure that each pupil attends as regularly as they possibly can.

The school maintains a strong focus on making sure that pupils have the knowledge and skills to live as independent a life as possible in the future. The ability to communicate, and to know that your views are valued, is fundamental to this process and makes a significant contribution to pupils' safety and well-being.

The school's well-developed careers programme ensures that the oldest pupils are fully informed of the options available when they leave. Parents of pupils in their final year in the school spoke to inspectors about the striking progress their children have made since joining, about their sadness that it is time to move on, and of their appreciation for the way in which their children are being supported with the transition. One said: 'The school fights to get the right support package and destination for each child.'

The school has a strong ethos of community and teamwork. Leaders engage well with school staff. They use a wide range of different approaches, such as staff meeting discussions and regular surveys, to seek staff views. Staff say that leaders are responsive to their suggestions and requests, including those made about planned developments in the school. They appreciate steps taken to support their well-being, such as the commissioning of a health and well-being advisory facility, which provides access to medical and therapeutic services.

Governors make a valuable contribution to the school and share the same high aspirations as staff. Governors use a wide range of information to support them in holding leaders to account and speak knowledgeably about the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in May 2014.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	125469
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10287956
Type of school	Special
School category	Community 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	106
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Karen Thomas
Headteacher	Rosie Clark and Sarah Smith (co-headteachers)
Website	www.woodlands.surrey.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	7 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Woodlands School caters for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties from across Surrey. Some pupils also have additional needs, including physical, sensory and behavioural needs, and autistic spectrum disorder.
- Almost all pupils have an education and health care (EHC) plan. Sometimes pupils are admitted for a period of assessment prior to being awarded an EHC plan.
- The school has provision for children from the age of two years old.
- The co-headteachers have been in post since January 2018 and October 2021 respectively. One of the co-headteachers works in the school full time, and one part-time.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors met with the co-headteachers and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also had a discussion with five governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection. They also considered the views expressed by staff in Ofsted's survey.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication, science, and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visits to lessons, a review of pupils' work, and discussions with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times of the school day. The lead inspector also met formally with a group of pupils.
- The inspection team gathered parents' views through Ofsted's survey, Parent View. The lead inspector also met with parents during the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jo Brinkley

His Majesty's Inspector

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