

Inspection of a good school: Woolston Brook School

Green Lane, Padgate, Green Lane, Padgate, Warrington, Cheshire WA1 4JL

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are welcomed to Woolston Brook School with a warm smile and a friendly greeting. Many pupils join the school having had difficulties in managing their feelings and regulating their behaviour at previous settings. Here, they begin to rebuild their trust in adults and develop a sense of belonging.

Pupils enjoy caring and nurturing relationships with staff who know them well. They trust that there is always an adult available to help them if they are worried.

The recent improvements in behaviour mean that pupils now behave well around school. Staff notice when pupils experience distress. They are quick to anticipate conflict and respond swiftly and sensitively to pupils' emotional needs. Pupils feel safe.

The school is ambitious for pupils. There are improvements happening to support the school's high expectations of what they want pupils to learn. However, many curriculum subjects are still in the early stages of development. This means that pupils are not as well prepared as they should be for their next steps in education. This is further hampered by some pupils not attending school regularly.

Pupils value the new lunchtime clubs that they can join. They also enjoy other opportunities that the school offers them to ready themselves for adult life. For example, pupils learn to use public transport, to shop and cook.

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

Woolston Brook School has been through a period of turmoil. This had affected how safe pupils felt in school and their behaviour. The new leadership team, including the interim executive board, have acted rapidly to make improvements. The school is again a stable

and caring place to be. However, this recent instability has delayed the school's plans to develop the curriculum.

In some subjects, the school has designed an effective curriculum from key stage 2 through to the end of key stage 4. In these subjects, the school has thought carefully about what it wants staff to teach pupils and the order in which they should teach it. The school's approach to the curriculum in these subjects ensures that most pupils achieve well.

In several other subjects, however, the curriculum is under developed. In these subjects, the school has not decided what pupils need to learn and when they should learn it. This hinders how well pupils achieve.

Overall, teachers explain new ideas clearly. They help pupils to revisit and remember important learning. They design activities that capture the interests of pupils. However, in some curriculum subjects, teachers do not have sufficient subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum. Where this is the case, teachers lack the confidence to carefully adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs. Some pupils, therefore, do not learn as well as they should.

The school identifies the needs of pupils with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) appropriately. This enables teachers to offer a range of support to help pupils achieve academically and to build their self-esteem. Many pupils arrive with gaps in their knowledge. An appropriate range of assessment information is gathered to identify these gaps. However, some staff do not use this information well to design learning which builds on what pupils know and can do. For these pupils, gaps remain in their knowledge and understanding.

The school recognises the importance of reading. Staff encourage pupils to read for pleasure. There has been an investment in new books to capture the interests of pupils of all ages. Where appropriate, pupils who struggle with reading are helped to catch up. Those who are confident readers have access to an appropriate range of books.

There have been successful changes in how the school deals with any inappropriate behaviour. This has drastically reduced the number of incidents of negative behaviour. The school is now typically a calm place, where pupils can learn and feel safe.

Pupils' attendance is low, and many pupils are persistently absent. In part, this is because of the recent turmoil in school. The school prioritises high attendance. It has a number of strategies to help rebuild pupils' confidence, so that they re-engage with their learning. However, the school does not analyse attendance information well enough to identify the key barriers that stop pupils from attending school regularly.

Pupils' personal development is a key priority. Staff organise activities that respond to current issues as they arise, including recent workshops on online safety. Pupils enjoy participating in an increasing range of local community activities and sporting competitions. Older pupils benefit from careers advice and guidance. This includes experiences which develop pupils' confidence, resilience and independence.

The interim executive board is highly experienced and knowledgeable. They bring an appropriate balance of support and challenge to the school. Staff morale has recently been restored. They value the support that they receive for their well-being and workload. For example, they appreciate the opportunity they have to share their views and to be listened to. Staff have regained their pride in working at the school and are eager to play their part in the school's improvement journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school has not given sufficient thought to the essential knowledge that pupils should learn and in what order they should learn it. This hinders some pupils from learning all that they should. The school should ensure that teachers have enough information to shape teaching and enable all pupils to achieve well.
- In some curriculum subjects, teachers do not have the subject knowledge that they need to deliver the curriculum consistently well. This stops some pupils from gaining the knowledge that they need. The school should ensure that staff are fully equipped to implement the curriculum effectively and confidently.
- Some staff do not use assessment information well to design learning which builds on pupils' prior knowledge. This does not help some pupils to close the gaps in their knowledge and understanding. It hinders their future learning. The school should ensure that staff have the support and guidance required to determine appropriate, clear and manageable next steps for pupils.
- Too many pupils are absent or persistently absent from school. These pupils miss out on their education and do not achieve as well as they should. The school should improve its systems to analyse attendance information, so that it clearly understands the barriers to pupils attending school regularly.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2019.

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	111501
Local authority	Warrington
Inspection number	10317808
Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	68
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Chris Forrest
Headteacher	Lindsay Regan (Executive headteacher), Kerry Stockdale (Acting headteacher)
Website	www.woolstonbrookschoo.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been considerable and sudden changes to the leadership team and staffing of the school. A temporary executive headteacher was appointed in December 2023. In January 2024, an acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher took up post.
- All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan for social, emotional and mental health needs or for autism spectrum disorder.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, including aspects of communication and language, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Where appropriate, inspectors spoke with some pupils about their learning. They also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- 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.
- Where appropriate, inspectors spoke with pupils about school life.
- Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, acting headteacher, deputy headteacher and other leaders, including the designated safeguarding leaders and members of the pastoral team. They also met with those responsible for SEND and for careers advice and guidance.
- Inspectors held discussions with staff, which focused on the well-being and safeguarding of pupils.
- The lead inspector spoke with the members of the interim executive board, including the chair of the board. She also spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including documents relating to school improvement.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michelle Beard

Ofsted Inspector

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