

INSPECTION REPORT

WOOLGROVE SCHOOL

Letchworth

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117689

Headteacher: Dr Rona Tutt

Reporting inspector: Ms Margaret Julia Goodchild
15918

Dates of inspection: 24 – 26 February 2003

Inspection number: 249372

Short inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Special
School category:	Community special
Age range of pupils:	4 to 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Pryor Way Letchworth
Postcode:	SG6 2PT
Telephone number:	01462 622422
Fax number:	01462 622022
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Chair of governors:	Mr Brian Frederick
Date of previous inspection:	5 May 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		
15918	Margaret Julia Goodchild	Registered inspector
1166	Rosemary Hussain	Lay inspector
20397	Rosa Blunt	Team inspector
23886	Declan McCarthy	Team inspector

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates
Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EW

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Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Woolgrove School is a day special school for pupils, aged 4 to 11, with moderate learning difficulties; a third of pupils also have autistic spectrum disorders. There are 110 pupils on roll, with over twice as many boys as girls. The majority of pupils come from North Hertfordshire but a few pupils with autism come from further afield. The vast majority of pupils are white; a very small minority are of Asian, Black or Chinese heritage. Two pupils are supported through ethnic minority achievement funding, although no pupil is identified as speaking English as an additional language. Seventeen pupils are eligible for free school meals. Pupils are admitted at the beginning of the term in which they are five or at any point up to the start of Year 6.

The school has an autism base (for eight pupils), which opened in January 1996 and moved into a purpose-built wing of the school in May 2001. The aim is to transfer pupils from the base into the main classes in the school when they are ready. There are now pupils with diagnosed autistic spectrum disorders across all classes in the school. There are more autistic pupils than at the time of the last inspection and this has led to a greater gender imbalance.

The school has provided outreach service to the 90 or more primary schools in its catchment area for over 20 years; as part of this work, it runs a resource centre where materials on special educational needs are available for sale or loan. Since the last inspection, the school has gained two School Achievement Awards, renewed its Investor in People status and in September 2001 became a Beacon school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an exceptionally effective school. Pupils make excellent progress in their personal development and very good progress towards their individual targets because they receive excellent care and the school enables individuals to flourish. Very good teaching fosters pupils' enthusiasm for learning and ensures that they achieve at least well academically and often very well. Their achievement is consistently very good in music, personal, social and health education and physical education. It is excellent in science. Woolgrove is very active in supporting other schools through its Beacon status and an extensive programme of outreach support. The headteacher provides strong and inspirational leadership, and the school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management; she is very well supported by the governing body and by staff in key posts of responsibility.
- Excellent emphasis on the personal development and care of pupils ensures that they are confident, enthusiastic learners who enjoy high quality relationships and have very positive attitudes.
- Pupils make excellent progress in science and the school's results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 are well above those of similar special schools nationally.
- Opportunities for staff to develop their expertise are excellent and this contributes to the high proportion of very good teaching in the school.
- The school works very effectively in partnership with parents and they show huge appreciation for what the school offers their children.
- Pupils are given a very good range of learning opportunities and the school has excellent links with other educational establishments through its outreach work and Beacon status.

What could be improved

- The inspection found no key issues requiring action beyond that already planned for by the school as part of its ongoing development.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since it was inspected in May 1998. Individual Education Plans include measurable targets for all pupils and there are more opportunities for pupils to be involved in their own target setting. Records of Achievement are used as a means of pupils reflecting on their progress and thinking about what they might achieve in the future. Senior managers and governors have explored ways of strengthening the school's development planning process, so that there is now a comprehensive system in place. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection; there is no unsatisfactory teaching and a much higher proportion of teaching is very good. The school has gained Beacon status and its work has been recognised by School Achievement Awards. Woolgrove is in a very good position to make further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table summarises inspectors' judgements about how well pupils are achieving in relation to their individual targets.

Progress in:	by Year 2	by Year 6	Key	
English	B	B	very good	A
mathematics	B	B	good	B
science	A	A	satisfactory	C
personal, social and health education	A	A	unsatisfactory	D
other personal targets set at annual reviews or in IEPs*	A	A	poor	E

* IEPs are individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

Pupils achieve very well and make very good progress towards their personal targets. In 2002 National Curriculum tests in Year 6, the school's science results were very high compared with national results for pupils with moderate learning difficulties or with autistic spectrum disorders, reflecting the excellent progress pupils make in science throughout the school. Progress in English and mathematics is good; progress in music, personal, social and health education and in physical education is very good. A number of pupils have made excellent progress in swimming, gaining certificates for swimming a mile, and most of the older pupils have gained several certificates. Pupils' achievement is at least good in all remaining subjects, and boys and girls achieve equally well. Those with autistic spectrum disorders make very good progress as a result of the high quality provision they receive.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have excellent attitudes to school. It is clear that they are happy and enthusiastic about all that the school has to offer.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good. Pupils' behaviour improves significantly during their time at the school. As a result, pupils work and play in a calm and orderly environment.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils make tremendous gains in their confidence and in their ability to relate to others.
Attendance	The attendance rate is above that of similar schools. Pupils love school

	and are very keen to attend.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils	Years R to 2	Years 3 to 6
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

There is a high proportion of very good teaching and nearly all the teaching is at least good. Lessons are thoroughly planned and pupils' behaviour is managed extremely well. Teachers make learning stimulating and accessible to pupils by using a wide and varied range of resources to create a multi-sensory experience. Teaching is very good in science, music, personal, social and health education and physical education. It is good in English, mathematics, art and design and technology and at least good in all remaining subjects, based on the work on display. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good, overall, and very good for the eldest pupils. Teachers pay careful attention to pupils' language development, to speaking and listening and to extending pupils' vocabulary across the curriculum. They ensure that pupils achieve well in all aspects of numeracy and mathematics. Information and communication technology is used very effectively across the curriculum. The needs of individual pupils are met very well and, as a result, pupils' are active and enthusiastic participants who concentrate very well and gain real enjoyment from learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is very good; links with other educational establishments through the school's Beacon status and outreach work are excellent.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school provides very well for pupils who have special educational needs that are additional to their moderate learning difficulties. There is considerable expertise within the school in how to provide for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and teaching of these pupils is very good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, and social development. It provides very well for their cultural development. Pupils are valued and so learn to value themselves and others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	This is a very caring school where staff have excellent relationships with pupils and a very good understanding of their individual needs. Procedures for managing pupils' behaviour are highly effective.

Partnership with parents is very good: the school does a great deal to inform and support parents, and to involve them. Parents are extremely pleased with the work of the school and the way it cares for their children.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key	The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management. Others in posts of responsibility fulfil their roles very competently, ensuring that the school is very efficiently managed. There is a strong sense of

staff	teamwork and a shared purpose throughout the school.
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How well the governing body fulfils its responsibilities	The governing body is very effective in fulfilling its responsibilities; a number of governors provide excellent expertise in particular areas of the school's work.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Procedures for evaluating the school's performance are very good. The headteacher does a great deal to evaluate its effectiveness and the school works constantly to improve the quality of education.
The strategic use of resources	The school has very good procedures to ensure that it achieves best value and makes very good use of the resources at its disposal.

All the staff are given excellent opportunities to extend their skills through professional development and there is a very good match between teachers' expertise and qualifications and pupils' needs. Support staff make a major contribution to the achievement that pupils make. The accommodation is good and the school has done much to develop its outdoor facilities so that they are very stimulating for pupils. The library is a highly effective resource, containing a wide range of fiction and non-fiction; learning resources are very good, overall, and enable teachers to make learning stimulating.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • They find the school very approachable and say that it works closely with them. • Teaching is good and expectations are high. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant criticisms received.

Inspection findings wholly support parents' very positive views of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and management; she is very well supported by the governing body and by staff in key posts of responsibility

1. The headteacher is dynamic and inspirational in her leadership and management of the school, providing very strong and clear direction to its work. Through her readiness to embrace new initiatives, whether they are local, national or international and to liaise with mainstream and special schools, she ensures that the school is at the cutting edge in the quality of education it provides for its pupils and that all staff work continuously to improve the school and to develop it further. The recognised and extensively used regional resource centre, the excellent outreach service and the more recent award of Beacon status are particular outcomes of the excellent leadership and management. The headteacher has been central to these initiatives over many years through her considerable knowledge and expertise, as well as contributing to the national debate on provision for pupils with special educational needs.
2. The school is strongly led, yet every member knows that he or she has a significant role to play, which is recognised and valued. The school has been enabled to move forward because the team spirit inspires a common sense of purpose and direction. Senior managers and others in key positions support the headteacher very well, so that the school functions exceptionally smoothly and efficiently from day to day. Those with posts of responsibility are clear about their role and the whole staff know what these roles are. Each member of the senior management team has a distinct area of responsibility, and fulfils her leadership role effectively. There is a high level of consistency in the way pupils are treated and managed, in what is expected of them and in the way the school's very clear policies are implemented. This consistency reflects the high quality leadership and a shared sense of purpose that permeate the school. These factors have been recognised over the significant period of time that the school has had Investors in People status.
3. The school has very good systems for monitoring and evaluating its work. The headteacher is very proactive in this and engages in much excellent analysis. Lesson monitoring is thorough and perceptive, and internal evaluation is complemented by careful consultation with parents and pupils. The manager of the lower school and the senior manager for the upper school are responsible for monitoring the curriculum for their areas. The senior manager for autism is responsible for monitoring the delivery of the curriculum to pupils on the autistic spectrum. All fulfil these duties with a thoroughness and commitment to making provision as good as it can possibly be. Furthermore, as part of the school's special educational needs policy, particular staff have a very useful 'watching brief' for pupils with particular types of difficulty, so that they monitor provision as well as gaining expertise that can be shared with other staff.
4. School development planning is thorough and reveals a sophistication and subtlety in the way senior managers and governors evaluate the school's performance and identify how the school could be improved. Development planning covers a three-year programme and is much more sharply focused and linked to performance management than at the time of the last inspection. Financial control is prudent and planning is closely aligned with the school's development priorities.
5. Governors provide very good support for the school, as well as holding it to account and taking an active role in shaping its direction. The chair and vice chair are very experienced and a number of governors have expertise in areas that are relevant and helpful to the school. The governors are most effectively led and organised into appropriate committees. They are kept informed by the headteacher's reports and each committee is served by a senior member of staff. A number of governors come in on informal visits, for example, to listen to pupils read, or with a particular subject focus. Procedures for governors' visits have recently been formalised and there is a schedule of criteria for formal monitoring.

6. Governors have a very good understanding of best value. As part of their concern to balance experienced staff with value for money, they compare the percentage spent on staffing with that in schools nationally. When entering into contracts, they scrutinise bids to ensure best value. They look at the outcomes of other schools to compare results and they use local education authority reviews to inform them of how the school is doing compared with similar schools in the locality.

Excellent emphasis on the personal development and care of pupils ensures that they are confident, enthusiastic learners who enjoy high quality relationships and have very positive attitudes

7. The school provides excellent care for its pupils. Systems for monitoring and reviewing their personal progress are comprehensive, and staff show vigilance and dedication towards every pupil in their care. Teamwork between teachers and therapists does much to ensure that the school considers the 'whole child' in its decisions; it also means that staff have a wide range of skills and techniques at their disposal. The school has three part-time speech and language therapists and a speech and language assistant, two physiotherapists, two occupational therapists, an art and music therapist. All play important parts in the effectiveness of the school's care.
8. Pupils make substantial gains in confidence and this enables them to move forward in their learning. All the staff show pupils that they value what each has to contribute and this enables every pupil to flourish personally and academically. Pupils are very happy and secure, with excellent attitudes to school. They say that they 'love' school and readily talk about what they consider to be its best features. They show much enthusiasm for learning and for the activities the school provides. Parents find that their children look forward to coming to school. One parent informed inspectors that his son sits watching at the window, waiting for the transport to arrive so that he can come to school.
9. The fact that pupils are confident and at ease is very evident in how well they learn and is revealed, for example, by the expressive artwork they produce. Pupils respond very well to the many opportunities they are given to experiment with a wide range of processes and techniques. They are able to combine media in innovative ways, producing unusual and refreshing effects. This is revealed by their tie and dye fabric prints, which combine feathers, glitter and a range of other materials, and the expressive mark making in group pictures after Monet and Van Gogh. In their tonal drawings of 'Someone I know', older pupils have worked expressively to produce highly individualised images that are full of character and are technically strong. Their confidence is also evident in the way they respond when they come together as a whole community. In assembly, pupils readily contribute by playing musical instruments, reading aloud, volunteering answers, or walking to the front of the hall to receive certificates.
10. Pupils are attentive and interested learners, who are very practised in putting up their hands, taking turns and listening to each other. The school encourages pupils to develop their independence and provides good opportunities for them to take responsibility, for example, as library monitors or by helping to put away the chairs after assembly. It makes excellent transition arrangements when pupils move from Woolgrove on to secondary schools, with careful development of their independence in preparation for this.
11. Pupils are very effective learners who concentrate well and persevere even if they find tasks difficult. In a literacy lesson in Years 3 and 4, pupils tried very hard when writing about what they had done over half-term and readily talked about what they had written. A strong work ethic was evident amongst the pupils, and they had genuine interest in learning and achieving. Pupils are very keen to show their work and are rightly pleased with their efforts. They are pleased when their application is acknowledged through the issue of stickers in lessons or certificates in assembly. Pupils have a good recall of knowledge they have gained in recent lessons and this helps them to make sense of topics that cross over from one subject to another, or to link learning in one lesson with what they did in the previous one. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders make clear efforts to communicate and listen well for extended periods of time. They respond well to signing, anticipate instructions and respond very well to clear directions.

12. The staff pay excellent attention to pupils' socialisation, encouraging them to take turns, listen carefully to what other people have to say and to respect others' experiences. The effectiveness of the school's approach is evident in the classroom, in assemblies, at lunch-time and in the playground; indeed, wherever the pupils come together in groups. Parents praise the way the school teaches their children how to relate to others. Pupils enjoy excellent relationships and a strong rapport with the staff, who react warmly to them and engender their trust whilst communicating high expectations at all times. As pupils arrive in the morning, many spontaneously greet the staff and one another. At lunchtimes, pupils sit in small family groups to develop their social skills as part of the planned curriculum. In the playground, pupils, including those with autistic spectrum disorders play together harmoniously and spontaneously. Pupils' social development is further promoted through frequent trips into the immediate locality and an annual adventure holiday gives pupils the opportunity to socialise and broaden their horizons.
13. Many pupils are able to work collaboratively in a group with little or no adult support. Even younger pupils in some lessons work well together and share resources amicably. Pupils interact calmly with one another and sometimes help each other. In personal, social and health education, pupils were supportive to one another and listened carefully to what others had to say. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders have good relationships with their teachers and support staff. They respond well to each other, giving good eye contact and greeting one another. Pupils take notice of and come to value others' efforts and successes. Pupils share a sense of collective pride when another member of their community achieves something. This was evident in class and in assembly when swimming certificates and other commendations were given out. As parents said, they recognise one another's differences and realise just how much another member of their group has tried in order to succeed. When individual pupils received certificates in assembly, all the pupils spontaneously applauded in celebration and showed enormous excitement.
14. Many pupils are thoughtful and teachers model consideration for others. In a personal, social and health education lesson in Year 5, pupils were able to interpret the feelings portrayed in a series of photographs, and many thought carefully about their answers and could say why they had reached a particular conclusion. Some higher-attaining pupils showed insight about the feelings of others when discussing the pictures, and could also relate this to their own feelings in different circumstances. Pupils show increased tolerance to the needs of others within a climate where they are encouraged to care about the feelings of those around them. Bullying and fighting are not tolerated and any incidents are dealt with promptly.
15. Behaviour is very good: the school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils can remember and say what the school rules are and they frequently know how to apply these in particular situations. For instance, in a personal, social and health education lesson in Years 3 and 4, where pupils experienced circle-time, they knew they must only speak when they were holding the object that indicated their turn had come, that they must listen to others and sit well. Many pupils are very obedient and focus absolutely on what they have been asked to do and the majority are highly co-operative. For instance, when some of the younger pupils were at the swimming pool, they waited patiently at the side until everyone was changed and ready to go in. Pupils make the transition between one activity and another, or between group work and clearing up very well.
16. The combined morning 'workout' and collective worship is an innovative means of focusing and calming all the pupils. It is an example of how well the staff know their pupils and adapt the curriculum to meet their needs. These sessions, which take place for all pupils on four mornings each week, provide a very positive start to the day and pupils enjoy the 'workout' enormously. They clearly have a very settling effect on the pupils. Being something they experience collectively, the 'workout' is powerful in the unifying effect it has. The combination of rhythmic chanting and movement is particularly effective in facilitating increased awareness and control for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. Breathing exercises are used skilfully to quieten pupils down ready for a prayer at the end. Prayers were beautifully spoken in all sessions during the inspection, leading pupils to a genuine state of reflection where they bowed their heads and listened reverently, joined in with saying the Lord's Prayer together or on one occasion, volunteered to say a prayer of their own.

17. Pupils' attitudes towards religion and beliefs are very respectful. In an art lesson where pupils in Year 6 heard a story about Creation, an excellent level of interest was evident. They showed sensitivity to the story and listened carefully to the details of how an intrinsically healthy environment has been damaged by mankind. The lesson made an excellent contribution also to pupils' moral development, emphasising the point of the story through the creation of images of beautiful green landscapes in contrast with a second batch of bleak pictures depicting burnt and broken forests.

Pupils make excellent progress in science and the school's results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 are very high compared with those of similar schools nationally

18. In 2002, nearly half the pupils achieved Level 3 in National Curriculum tests in science, and a small minority reached Level 4, which is the national expectation for pupils in mainstream schools. These results far exceed the national average for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. They are a direct result of the subject being co-ordinated by a subject specialist who has experience of teaching science in mainstream secondary schools and of an approach to the subject that is very well suited to pupils' learning needs. Lesson observation and the scrutiny of pupils' work show that they are now making excellent progress in science throughout the school and acquiring a detailed knowledge of a range of topics, because all teachers have at least good subject knowledge and learning is made exciting.
19. Curriculum planning in science places strong emphasis on investigation, prompting pupils to observe, hypothesise, record the results of experiments and engage in challenging thinking. All expected National Curriculum topics are covered in planning for the subject, including data-handling and the use of information and communication technology for investigation. Homework extends pupils' learning; older pupils have, for example, completed work at home on levers and evaporation. The school has a number of high quality 'big books' on the life cycle of different creatures, and teachers use these very well to promote literacy. Pupils learn key words - such as bacteria, protozoa, virus, yeast, mould and condensation - and engage in written work for a purpose when recording the outcomes of investigations or answering questions. Numeracy skills are also developed very well through science because pupils measure forces, distances, weight, mass, volume and temperature. They learn to confront large numbers, such as '186,000 miles per second' as the speed of light, and use the computer to record data from investigations. Pupils go out on many visits with a scientific focus, such as their trip to the Millennium Dome, to a space rocket exhibition in Letchworth, and to Astonbury Woods, and the school has extensive grounds where they can study 'minibeasts' and other wildlife.
20. Lesson planning in science is very thorough and activities are very well conceived to bring the subject alive, especially through the development of pupils' investigational skills. Pupils enjoy the subject very much because it enables them to be very active learners and they make excellent progress at the same time. In a lesson for pupils in Years 5 and 6, for instance, an emphasis on investigation enabled them to develop a clear understanding of the separation of dyes using chromatography, and to a knowledge of the use of this process in police forensic investigations.
21. Lessons are very well prepared and teachers use excellent resources that frequently appeal to several senses at once. This was particularly the case in a lesson in Year 3, where pupils learnt about the life cycle of the frog. The teacher took every opportunity to reinforce pupils' vocabulary, naming the different stages in the life of a frog and emphasising comparative language. She made excellent use of questioning to maintain pupils' interest and encourage close observation, introducing a range of resources to reinforce and extend their knowledge. Three jigsaws were used to show the three main stages, and eight photographs encouraged close observation, reinforcing the sequence in the development of a frog. All pupils, regardless of their prior attainment, could recognise the three main stages, from frogspawn to tadpoles to frogs, and most could recognise the more minor developments revealed by the eight photographs. Higher-attaining

pupils could describe the changes using the correct vocabulary

and make comparisons between the different stages. Pupils had the opportunity to engage in extensive discussion about the topic, they showed real enjoyment in learning and were eager to answer questions.

22. Pupils' interest in the subject and their very good concentration mean that they grasp a good deal of detail. In a lesson in Year 5 on the heart, blood and vascular system, pupils watched a stimulating video and were then able to answer detailed questions. They knew how many times a resting heart usually beats in a minute, that the heart pumps blood and that it is made of muscle. The teacher's demonstration of an actual pump, with water that had been dyed red, did much to capture pupils' imagination and interest. Some had a good recall of other parts of the body and bodily processes and a display of their previous work showed that they had recorded information accurately and been able to answer questions about cells, digestion and other major bodily processes.
23. Pupils achieve particularly well in science because they retain what they have learned. They are able to transfer their skills from one topic to another within science and to make connections between their learning in science and related knowledge in other subjects. In a lesson on fertilisation and incubation as part of studying the life cycle of a hen, pupils were able to relate some aspects of the life of a chicken to that of a human being. In food technology, they could remember from their science lesson that steam condenses back into water droplets. Teachers encourage such links and carefully build on pupils' prior knowledge. At the end of science lessons, teachers ask pupils challenging questions to determine how much they have remembered and to check their knowledge of new vocabulary. In the morning 'workout', teachers remind pupils of the parts of the body they are exercising and ask questions about what they are feeling and why their body is reacting in a certain way. This constant reinforcement across the curriculum means that pupils not only remember information, but can relate it to everyday life in a way that is clearly meaningful and relevant to them.

Opportunities for staff to develop their expertise are excellent and this contributes to the high proportion of very good teaching in the school

24. Staff work in a culture where continuous study and professional development for teachers and teaching assistants are the norm. Several teachers are studying for higher degrees, as well as for diplomas and certificates. All the teaching assistants have undertaken training and the school has identified the potential for some assistants to train as teachers; it is making excellent use of their skills and finding ways to support their further development. Considering how best to support the learning of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and others with particularly complex needs is central to the study staff undertake. Staff at all levels have completed or are currently undertaking in-depth courses in the education of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders and a range of other difficulties. In-service training courses are organised and presented by the autism base for new staff, and this year all staff have attended a large number of training sessions provided within the school. As a result, teachers and teaching assistants have developed a high level of skill, which has had a direct impact on the quality of teaching and the way pupils are supported. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection and there is an unusually high proportion of very good teaching: the quality of teaching was very good in two thirds of lessons and good in nearly all the remaining lessons seen.
25. Planning shows clearly what groups and individuals will do, and teachers frequently make very good links between subjects in their planning. In a music lesson for pupils in Years 4 and 5, excellent planning included highly relevant and well-chosen learning objectives to promote and reinforce communication, speaking, listening and music making using a very good range of percussion instruments. Activities are well organised to meet objectives and teachers choose methods that make learning accessible to pupils. Groups are organised very well so that teaching assistants and pupils know exactly what they are meant to do. Teachers' planning is

very clear for teaching assistants to follow. Staff have high expectations and communicate these clearly to pupils. There is a very clear expectation of how pupils should behave, that work will be completed and to what level. As a result, pupils are able to learn in a purposeful atmosphere within well-defined boundaries. Teachers expect a high level of focus and

concentration from their pupils and convey to them the importance of learning. They control pupils' behaviour largely by maintaining their interest, as well as by communicating high expectations.

26. Teachers explain tasks very carefully and have good signing skills. They ensure that pupils are all involved throughout the lesson; they praise success and provide extension activities to challenge higher-attaining pupils. In the best lessons, a brisk pace promotes pupils' concentration and high productivity. Teaching in such lessons is dynamic and enthusiastic, so that pupils are stimulated to learn and work is made exciting, as in a very good music lesson. Teachers ask questions that lead pupils to make choices, think hard, refine their answers, express their ideas and comment on their work.
27. Teachers make good use of pupils' prior knowledge and they are very good at forging links between subjects. In mathematics, for example, work on three-dimensional shapes is linked to making model buildings in design and technology and in all subjects, teachers pay careful attention to pupils' language development.
28. Pupils receive a great deal of evaluative feedback and praise. Marking makes clear to them what they need to do to improve, as well as rewarding them for what they have done well. Questioning often very effectively elicits information from pupils, so that teachers are able to check what they already understand or recall. Good records are kept and related to pupils' ongoing targets. Some teachers are very good at reminding pupils about their targets and getting them to think carefully about what they are doing in relation to them. Where teaching is at its best, teachers use the end of the lesson not only to check pupils' understanding, but to celebrate and reward them for their achievement. In a highly effective literacy lesson, the teacher asked pupils to read back what they had written. She then showed the class a pupil's writing from that lesson and writing done by the same pupil some weeks previously, so that they could share in the pupil's success and recognise just how much progress had been made.
29. Teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants is exceptionally strong, so that adults usually work seamlessly to promote pupils' progress. The role of teaching assistants is very clear and most teachers have excellent organisational skills in the way they use their support staff. As a result, time is also used very well. Teaching assistants, in their turn, work very effectively and unobtrusively with pupils, questioning and supporting them to make their own decisions and deepen their involvement with the task that has been set. In an information and communication technology lesson, teaching assistants had very good computer skills and were very clear about the teaching points and the use of the program. In a literacy lesson where a teaching assistant took some pupils out of class to work in a small group, she had excellent skills and knew exactly how to develop pupils' phonic awareness.
30. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology and, as a result, pupils are making good progress in a range of processes and applications. Work on display shows that pupils use the Internet to research topics, learn how to send e-mails, experiment with patterns and tessellations, combine text and images, and some have recently enjoyed working with an interactive whiteboard. Displays of work in information and communication technology are of high quality and show the breadth of activities in which computers are used to assist pupils' learning as well as the quality of work that is produced.
31. When working with pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, teachers make excellent use of a range of apparatus (such as hoops, rubber bouncing toys and a mini-trampoline) to promote communication and interaction. Similarly, in a mathematics lesson, teachers used concrete resources to develop these pupils' understanding of the properties of geometric shapes, and a

number of activities, each for a short burst of time, held pupils' concentration and prompted them to communicate. Lessons in the autism base provide pupils with total communication, using tactile stimuli, symbols and signing. Along with very clear and direct communication, these features are key to the school's high level of success with these pupils.

The school works very effectively in partnership with parents and they show huge appreciation for what the school offers their children

32. The school's partnership with parents is very good and the level of parental satisfaction is excellent. An increasing number of parents 'fight' for a place at the school and parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting or who wrote letters to accompany their completed questionnaires spoke glowingly about the school's effectiveness, saying that it is 'wonderful', that it 'gives pupils the best possible start', is 'very well organised and high achieving', 'superb' and 'exceptional'. Parents feel a tremendous pride in the school and have a sense of collective ownership. They put this down to the approachability of the staff and the way parents, staff and governors work together to provide the best for their children.
33. Parents are kept very well informed and are welcomed into the school. The headteacher sends an annual questionnaire to gauge parents' views and all parents automatically belong to the Friends of Woolgrove. Some help in class, in the library or on school trips. A thriving parents' group meets regularly to have coffee together and to listen to a variety of speakers. The school's open-door policy enables parents to be in regular contact and know that they will be welcomed as partners in their children's education. Regular newsletters are sent to them and they are invited to a termly meeting to discuss their child's Individual Education Plan targets; in the summer term, this is combined with the annual review. The governing body has recently appointed a non-parent governor to be available to hear any parental concerns, with the intention of having another avenue to iron out any difficulties at an early stage. This is a very positive development and shows how seriously staff and governors view parents' role in their children's education.
34. Parents have found that Woolgrove is a place where their children are able to thrive, and come on 'in leaps and bounds'. The fact that staff very quickly get to know each pupil and the way the school looks at great depth into every single pupil's background and needs are factors that parents realise enable pupils to succeed. They value the way this detailed information is shared by all who work in the school, so that each pupil receives exactly the right provision. Parents consider that the excellent leadership of the school has a very direct impact on the progress their children make; they speak about how the headteacher's positive attitude permeates the whole school and the way she 'knows each pupil individually' and responds to their strengths and weaknesses, so that 'everyone is made to feel important'.
35. The multi-disciplinary approach¹ is another feature that parents identify as a strong contributory factor in their children's progress. They say that approaches informed by therapists are built into the fabric of the teaching, because the therapists work *in situ* and staff gain much expertise from them. Parents value the way the school educates the whole child and express the belief that teachers are here because they 'want to work with these pupils'. The dedication and devotion of the whole staff is very much appreciated by parents.
36. One parent spoke of the 'unconditional positive regard' that is extended to each pupil. All the parents agree that there is a very strong sense of community. Differences, in needs and provision, are celebrated by the school and therefore by the pupils themselves. Pupils are instantly happy when they join the school and parents all felt they had 'found the right place' when their children began at Woolgrove.

Pupils are given a very good range of learning opportunities and the school has excellent links with other educational establishments through its outreach work and Beacon status

37. A very good range of learning opportunities enables pupils to be engaged as active learners and to make very good progress towards their individual targets. The curriculum is carefully planned to

¹ This refers to the way in which teachers, therapists and others with expertise in the development and care of pupils with special educational needs work in close collaboration.

- meet the needs of individual pupils, drawing on the wide range of teaching and therapeutic expertise the school has at its disposal.
38. One of the best features of the curriculum is the education of pupils with autism. Pupils in the autism base are housed in purpose-built accommodation, equipped specifically for their needs. They all join in with activities in the main school and as soon as they are ready, have an individual integration plan. The school is very effective in integrating them fully into one of the main classes at the earliest opportunity because so many of the staff have undertaken training in autism. These pupils are managed very effectively throughout the school and make much better progress than similar pupils nationally.
39. There are very good extra-curricular and other enrichment opportunities. Pupils have the opportunity to attend an after-school club and a variety of lunch-time activities. They go horse-riding and swim regularly at a nearby pool. There are many trips out during the school day to a wide range of different venues, and staff plan very carefully to ensure that such time not only broadens pupils' personal horizons but is academically enriching. The evening performances of the annual pantomime are regarded as a highlight by staff and parents alike, as is the annual PGL holiday. The school welcomes a wealth of visitors who do much to extend and enrich pupils' experiences. These have included representatives of world religions and cultures that are unfamiliar to the pupils, as well as artists who have run workshops in the school.
40. As a result of its extensive outreach programme and Beacon status, the school has an excellent relationship with a large number of educational establishments. The school has provided outreach service to the 90 or more primary schools in its catchment area for over 20 years. The four main features of the service are that:
- Trained outreach teachers visit local schools to offer practical support and advice, either through pupil-focused or school-focused visits.
 - Local teachers and support staff come to Woolgrove to visit the Special Needs Resource Centre and the school itself, which is used as a working model of good practice.
 - A termly in-service training programme is offered to local schools, covering various aspects of special educational needs.
 - A reintegration programme ensures that pupils from special schools are supported if they return to mainstream education, including those moving into Year 7 at secondary schools. Records are kept of the 140 pupils who have returned to date.
41. The school became a Beacon school in September 2001. The current strands of work relating to Beacon status are as follows:
- Raising awareness and understanding of autistic spectrum disorders, which includes putting on an annual conference within the local education authority.
 - Working with Stevenage mainstream schools to implement a Year 6 to 7 mentoring project to support vulnerable pupils as they transfer from primary to secondary schools. The first cycle of this work has just been completed. In 2002, 13 staff trained as mentors, 11 of whom worked in schools on the mentoring programme.
 - Working in partnership with a special school in Luton, which is going through a period of considerable change.
 - Being available to staff from other schools who ask to visit, often as part of the NPQH leadership training for senior managers or other training courses.
42. Through the school's extensive work with other establishments, it is encouraged to be outward looking and self-questioning. Staff are exposed to the practices of mainstream and special school colleagues not only within their own authority but from far afield, as a result of the many visitors the school receives. In this way, outreach work and Beacon status give as much to Woolgrove as it is able to give to other schools. In the headteacher's words, this work 'keeps the school vibrant' and 'the whole staff alive'.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	37
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	15

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	0	25	11	1	0	0	0
Percentage	0	67	30	3	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents almost three percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	110

Special educational needs	No of pupils
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	110
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	110

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.2

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for last whole term before the inspection

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
99	1	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
3	0	0

The table refers to pupils of compulsory school age only. It gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: YR – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	17.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	6.36

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: YR– Y6

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	599

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	1116183.60
Total expenditure	1115256.3
Expenditure per pupil	10521.28
Balance brought forward from previous year	59944.72

Balance carried forward to next year	60872.05
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Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	106
Number of questionnaires returned	78

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	83	15	1	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	73	21	1	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	55	31	4	0	10
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	51	33	4	3	9
The teaching is good.	91	7	1	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	76	21	3	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	86	14	0	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	81	18	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	77	21	0	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	87	13	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	69	26	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	55	27	5	0	13

- There is a remarkably high level of parental satisfaction, with much agreement over the key strengths of the school. Clearly, Woolgrove is a very popular choice with parents, both academically and for the wider development of their children.