

Woodlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115228
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	290172
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Abbott HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1516
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Jones
Headteacher	Mr Andy White
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001
School address	Takely End Kingswood Basildon Essex SS16 5BA
Telephone number	01268282146
Fax number	01268531655

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Woodlands School is one of the largest 11–16 schools in the country. It includes a specialist centre for pupils with speech or communication difficulties. It was designated a Training School in 2002, a Leading Edge school in 2004 and a Specialist Performing Arts College in 2005. It has the Advanced Healthy Schools award.

Pupils' overall attainment when they start at the school is close to average and fewer pupils than average are entitled to free school meals. However, the school serves an area of income and educational deprivation and few families have experience of higher education.

The vast majority of pupils are of white British heritage and very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The proportions with learning difficulties or disabilities and with statements of special educational needs are average. Very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Woodlands School provides an outstanding quality of education that transforms the lives of its pupils and benefits the whole community in an area where incomes are below average and few families have any experience of higher education. The school is highly successful in its mission to broaden the outlook and enhance the life opportunities of pupils. Its success in raising aspirations in the local community is evident in the number of pupils who are now moving on to higher education, many of whom are the first in their family to do so. Pupils' enjoyment of school is apparent from their good attendance and behaviour, and their very good attitudes in class. They feel safe and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. Their contributions to the running of the school and to wider communities are exceptional.

The leadership of the school is outstanding. Pupils' needs are given the highest priority. The capacity to improve is excellent because leaders and governors take a long-term view, ensuring that improvement is sustainable. A relentless focus on improvement and quality assurance has led to outstanding personal development and well being and good achievement. The school gives very good value for money and works exceptionally well in partnership with others.

Although standards are close to average when pupils join the school, many families lack the resources that might support their children's learning at the higher levels. However, the school's excellent curriculum, outstanding care, guidance and support and its good teaching enable pupils to overcome any social and educational disadvantage and to make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Achievement is good overall and outstanding in Key Stage 3. High standards are achieved in mathematics, languages and performing arts. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well due to the high quality of support and there is no significant underachievement. Although there is scope to improve results further, the quality of education is outstanding in the wider sense of preparing pupils for future economic and personal well being.

The school has established a culture in which leadership skills are consciously developed through delegation and support and staff expect to devote time regularly to improving their skills. As a result, Woodlands attracts and retains effective teachers. The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding practice. The best teaching challenges pupils to think for themselves and develops their skills as independent learners. The performing arts specialism is helping to spread this good practice more widely, but there is room for further improvement in some subjects. The scope and attention to detail of the school's monitoring and evaluation are excellent. The school is aware of areas where it can improve, such as the quality of some marking, the scope for better use of assessment to inform lesson planning and, more prosaically, the toilet facilities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop approaches to learning that challenge pupils to think for themselves and develop their skills as independent learners.
- Further improve the consistency of marking and the use of assessment, both to guide lesson planning and to ensure pupils know how to improve.
- Improve the quality of pupils' toilets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good overall with outstanding features. Standards and achievement have improved steadily for many years. The best indication of achievement is the transforming effect the school has on pupils' lives, with many now continuing into higher education. The school guides pupils to take subjects at Key Stage 4 that will serve them well in the future, such as languages. Vocational subjects are taken if they are relevant, but not simply as grade boosters. Outstanding achievement in mathematics, languages and performing arts broadens pupils' horizons. Along with good achievement in science and English, this provides a very good basis for further study. Compared to similar pupils in other schools, Woodlands pupils are more likely to meet the key target of achieving five or more GCSEs (including English and mathematics) at grade C+. Pupils are prepared very well for continuing their studies, a feature remarked upon by local colleges. Wider aspects of achievement are built in to some subjects, such as the ability to work in teams and to use initiative in solving problems. For the last few years, the standards in each new intake have been close to the national norm, though this was not the case for recent leavers, who started below average. The school sets high expectations and pupils generally achieve the challenging targets set for them. They make good and sometimes outstanding progress during Key Stage 3 and the standards of their work at age 14 are generally above average, and sometimes well above average. In the most recent GCSE results, standards at age 16 were in line with the national average overall, representing good progress for the pupils concerned. Very good mathematics results were balanced by below average results in English. The impact of recent strategies to improve standards in English is already apparent in Year 11 and overall standards are now generally above average. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve at least as well as others. Although no groups underachieve, girls achieve better than boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well being are outstanding. Their enjoyment of all aspects of school life is evident. For example, they enjoy lessons that feature independent learning, role play or the use of ICT and interactive white-boards. The good and improving attendance provides another measure of increased pupils' satisfaction. Pupils behave maturely in lessons and around the school, showing respect for each other and for adults. Their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding because they have many opportunities and experiences offered through innovative curriculum delivery, a wide variety of enrichment activities and the influence of the international school dimension.

Pupils are increasingly aware of adopting safe practices and healthy lifestyles. For example, in a Year 10 drama lesson, pupils demonstrated mature attitudes and in-depth knowledge of healthy life styles by developing sketches around sexually transmitted diseases and internet safety. Other contributory factors are the strong PSHE and citizenship programmes, the way the school listens to pupils' views and the whole-school healthy week focus. The school has achieved the Advanced Healthy Schools award. It does not tolerate smoking or fighting; pupils are aware of the sanctions but also of the support available to help them. Their views are listened to and their suggestions are being implemented, for example in the increased security measures.

Pupils contribute to the school and local community to an outstanding degree. Many are involved in school performances, like Einstein's Dream, which involved over 400 pupils. They are also involved in charitable activities, working in partnership with other schools and colleges. For example, the environment club has lobbied local councillors and MPs about their concerns and ideas for improving litter awareness in the school and local community. As a result the school has been selected to pilot a community recycling plant on its site.

Preparation for future economic well being is a considerable strength. Pupils have many opportunities to take on responsibility. Each year, sixty Year 10 pupils are trained to take on leadership roles and to contribute to the running of the school. They help to organise some assemblies and to produce 'Woodlands Weekly'. This 'leadership group' develops articulate, confident pupils keen to be potential leaders in the future. Support for pupils moving onto employment or post-16 education is excellent and many pupils now aspire to higher education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding features. Pupils respond with mature behaviour and responsible attitudes to learning. Most lessons are well planned and include a range of teaching and learning styles, including a review of progress. Stimulating and varied activities motivate and address the needs of all pupils. In these lessons, pupils take pride in their work and achieve well because teachers are clear about what they expect them to learn. Homework is set regularly. Good management ensures that the well trained teaching assistants are often involved in lesson planning. As a result, pupils with learning difficulties are expertly supported and achieve well. The most able pupils are identified at an early stage and suitably challenged through extension work and extra-curricular activities.

In the significant proportion of outstanding lessons, teachers set very challenging targets and ensure a brisk pace of learning. They assess pupils' understanding regularly, using different levels of questioning and allowing time for extended answers. In some subjects, such as performing arts and modern languages, pupils have opportunities to use their initiative and to work independently. This outstanding practice makes learning a most enjoyable experience, contributing to the outstanding achievement. Performing arts techniques are used well in other subjects.

There is a rigorous professional development programme providing support and training for teachers at different stages of their careers. One example is the focus on developing skills for independent learning. The quality of teaching is regularly monitored through lesson observations. Marking and other forms of assessment are used well in some departments but the quality varies. In some subjects, pupils do not know the level at which they are working and receive limited guidance on how to improve their work. The school is working to develop the use of assessment in lessons to improve pupils' understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school offers an outstanding and broadly based curriculum that enables pupils of all abilities to achieve well. It is subject to a continuous programme of review to ensure the changing needs of pupils, employers and the local community are taken into account. The school plays a leading

role in the 14-19 partnership and offers several vocational courses, some through local colleges. Excellent planning and monitoring ensure success for pupils who combine school with work and college placements. There are very effective work experience and careers programmes available to all. Pupils have very good opportunities to work in teams and to develop enterprise and financial skills. Where subjects are taught across the curriculum, such as information and communication technology and citizenship, planning is effective.

Pupils' enjoyment and achievement are exceptionally well enhanced through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. These include clubs, visits, extended trips and numerous performing arts activities. These are well supported and play a significant role in pupils' personal development. Pupils regularly take a lead in organising and running activities such as the junior sports leader award and the dance club. Out-of-hours provision for revision and coursework is very effective in helping pupils to achieve their potential. The 'DropaDay' programme gives regular opportunities for sustained work in one or two subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The level of care and support the school provides for all pupils is outstanding. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. Academic and pastoral guidance are strong because of detailed and regular monitoring of pupils by heads of year and their teams. Regular pupil reviews and very good pupil profiling ensure that pupils achieve their targets. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are supported very well by dedicated staff, who use a wide range of strategies to raise pupils' self-confidence and attainment. There is very good partnership with parents, including family learning sessions.

Performing arts has a valuable cross-curricular role and enhances pupils' personal, social and health education. Pupils are very well supported to make informed choices at ages 14 and 16. The careers programme includes taster sessions working in partnership with local colleges. Visits to universities encourage pupils to access higher education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher is an approachable, inspirational and highly respected leader who gives direction to the school that is clear and embraced by all. He passionately believes that the school's mission is to raise the aspirations and the academic and personal achievement of all its pupils. He has assembled an able senior team who are equally committed to this purpose. Whole-school priorities are annually reviewed and revised in a cycle of thorough school self-evaluation and development planning, which involves governors, staff and pupils. There is excellent attention to detail, ensuring that changes are properly embedded.

Middle management is good, with some exceptional strengths. Self-evaluation at this level, fairly recently introduced, is gaining in effectiveness. The senior leaders rigorously and systematically monitor and support subject and pastoral leaders, helping them to improve the areas for which they are responsible and to develop their own leadership roles.

Governors are kept very well informed by the school. They involve themselves judiciously in the life and work of the school and give strong and constructively critical support. The initial funding from gaining specialist status has been put to good use and further funding will enhance

facilities. The school selects, trains and deploys staff well, making good use of its Training School status. Accommodation, though sometimes cramped, is well used, but the school is fighting a losing battle to maintain the outdated toilet facilities in a satisfactory condition.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A**Leadership and management**

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

23 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Woodlands School, Takely End, Kingswood, Basildon, Essex SS16 5BA

I am writing to tell you the results of your school's inspection. Before I do that, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your co-operation and help during our visit. You played a vital role in the inspection and helped us get a true picture of the school. It is clear that you enjoy school, behave well and have very good attitudes in class. You told us you feel safe and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. You have a significant say in the running of the school and we have supported your recommendation to improve the toilet facilities.

The inspection found that Woodlands School provides an outstanding quality of education that transforms your lives and benefits the whole community. For example, many of you now expect to go on to higher education, even if no-one in your family has done so before. The school helps you to learn more about the world beyond your everyday experience, through visits, work experience, community work, performing arts, sports, learning about other cultures and learning a foreign language.

We were very impressed with the senior leaders in the school, and by the subject and year heads. Most of all we felt that Mr White gives outstanding leadership to the school in which your needs are the most important. He has made sure that all staff are always looking for ways to improve their teaching, your learning and the way the school cares for you. As a result, you make good progress with your learning and your personal development.

The school provides you with excellent care, guidance and support. You have a really good range of courses and you are taught well. We felt that some of the marking could be more helpful to you and that more lessons should encourage you to think for yourselves. These things already happen in the best lessons. Although we feel there is room to improve on last year's results at GCSE, we also think that the very high quality of education prepares you really well for the future. On behalf of the team, I wish you all the best.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott HMI

Lead Inspector