



Woolgrove School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117689
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290896
Inspection date 28 November 2006
Reporting inspector George Derby

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Pryor Way
School category	Community special		Letchworth
Age range of pupils	4-11		Hertfordshire SG6 2PT
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01462 622422
Number on roll (school)	106	Fax number	01462 622022
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Brian Fredrick
		Headteacher	Mrs Bridget Walton
Date of previous school inspection	24 February 2003		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Woolgrove School is a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Over recent years the needs of pupils have become more complex. About a half now have autism. An increasing number have speech and language difficulties, while some have serious medical conditions. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is typical for this type of school. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds while about a tenth are from a variety of minority ethnic groups. When they enter the school, the pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are at a low level compared with children of a similar age. The school provides a local authority funded outreach service, supporting pupils, families and staff in mainstream schools in North Hertfordshire. The school has a very large number of prestigious awards for its work.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Parents are highly satisfied with this outstanding school. As one wrote, 'Woolgrove is an excellent school....the relationship between staff and pupils is excellent and staff are very supportive and caring.' This comment typifies the school's ethos which results in pupils enjoying school greatly, trying their very hardest and succeeding extremely well. Both their personal development and academic achievement are outstanding. Many parents believe their children are transformed by the school and they are right! As one parent stated about her child, 'he enjoys school and is learning important things that he didn't understand in his previous school.' From the beginning of the school, with its exceptional Foundation Stage, to when pupils leave, they are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage of education and for future life.

The school has gone from strength to strength since its last inspection and it is extremely well placed to continue to do so. The school's great success comes from the very top where flair, imagination and high levels of expertise of the headteacher, governors and senior team drive the right developments forward at a rapid pace. It is a school which knows itself exceptionally well, is tenacious in finding ways of improving and is highly responsive to pupils' changing needs. Its approach to checking its own work and that of the pupils' progress is highly sophisticated and findings always result in adjustments to practice. It works exceptionally well with outside agencies, parents and other schools.

Insistence on the very best from all, through excellent leadership and management, results in excellent teaching. This is because the highly competent and wide ranging staff team are very well qualified and know the needs of their pupils exceptionally well. Planning is extremely thorough and work excellently matched to pupils' needs. Pupils do so well because they are highly challenged in lessons and classrooms and corridors celebrate pupils' successes. The school is an emotionally comfortable and secure place in which to learn, a particularly important factor in autistic pupils' successes.

Excellent attention is given to pupils' personal needs. This is particularly good for supporting their health through for example, the pupils' early morning 'workout', and results in pupils' thorough knowledge about the importance of exercise and diet. Outcomes of pupil surveys result in changes to support their safeguarding and in their excellent knowledge of how to keep safe. In fact, the way the school uses the 'voice' of the child to influence how they are cared for is outstanding. Self-esteem is boosted massively and pupils become very confident and sensitive in their dealings with others, making an excellent contribution to their school community.

The opportunities that pupils have to learn outside lessons, and the impact on their personal development are excellent. Opportunities for learning are good during the school day and information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to support learning. However, planning for ICT itself is not thorough enough to ensure that pupils' skills in ICT progress as well as they do in other subjects.

The school provides a high quality support service to mainstream schools which is extremely well valued by them. It does not, however, have wide ranging rigorous ways to check on how effective this is. The school is already working with the local authority to improve this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that planning for ICT is clearly linked to a clear long-term plan, that pupils have opportunities to learn about all aspects and they build on previous learning to make progress which is as good as in other subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve consistently highly because of the exceptional quality of teaching and the excellent support they get for their needs. From the excellent progress they make in the Foundation Stage, and particularly so in communication and personal and social development, to Year 6, pupils build very carefully on what they have learned previously. This is in small successful steps. The longer they are in the school the more their progress accelerates, especially their communication skills! A small number of pupils approach the expected National Curriculum levels by Year 6. This is especially so in science, a subject in which pupils do best. Pupils also do very well in English and achieve well in mathematics. Progress in ICT is satisfactory. The school's work to improve writing has paid dividends; writing achievement is now high. Pupils with autism do extremely well in mathematics. Comparison with similar groups of pupils shows that pupils who are autistic do significantly better than most and that no group underachieves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The pupils thoroughly enjoy school life and their attendance, as a result, is excellent. They respond to lessons and other activities with infectious enthusiasm. They grow in confidence, self-esteem and maturity and make significant strides in their personal development.

Most pupils' behaviour is exceptional and particularly so in Years 5 and 6. A few younger pupils find it hard to conform to the demands of the day and staff requests but are excellently supported to do so.

Pupils get on extremely well with one another and with the staff and have a growing sensitivity regarding the needs of others. They feel safe, and understand the importance of making healthy choices. They influence strongly what happens to themselves, their community and their environment, because the school successfully empowers them to do so. They readily embrace opportunities to take responsibility; for instance, as representatives of the school council, where they are involved actively in making

decisions, and in fundraising. As a result of all this, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

The excellent progress that they make in developing their basic skills and the development of a wide range of personal qualities, stand them in good stead for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers' assessment is thorough, precise, and used exceptionally well to plan the next steps in learning. It is this knowledge, together with the staff's high degree of expertise which results in extremely well planned lessons and very well organised activities which meet pupils' needs exceedingly well. Pupils' targets are referred to regularly, marking of work is rigorous and pupils know what to do to improve. Teamwork is thorough and teachers, assistants and therapists make significant contributions to lessons and to learning. Pupils are managed exceptionally well.

Pupils get a real joy out of learning because the school makes it exciting and puts pupils firmly at the heart of what it does. Probing questioning deepens pupils' understanding and work is highly challenging. Pupils rise to this incredibly well. Literacy skills are particularly well promoted and key vocabulary and ideas explained very well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The range of activities outside lessons is excellent. A variety of lunchtime activities, clubs after school and a fortnightly Saturday morning 'school' for parents of autistic pupils and their children broadens pupils outlook and make a significant contribution to their learning and personal development. The school makes sure that all who want to are supported to attend.

There is a rich and varied range of opportunities within school above that usually seen. Specialist teaching in French, physical education, music and in science in the latter part of the school results in subjects which are particularly enjoyed because of staff's subject expertise. The school's planning and focus on pupils' safety, health, their understanding of, and contribution to, the community and of other cultures is clearly at the heart of the curriculum. Planning is detailed and thorough in most subjects, except for ICT. Computers are used very well to support pupils' learning and communication. However, not all aspects of ICT are covered; despite pupils having lots of experiences in using computers, staff's planning does not show how skills are to be taught in line with the school's long-term plan.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This is an extremely caring school which is highly responsive to pupils' needs and which uses its knowledge of these very well. Its analyses of pupils' performance and the tracking of their progress are excellent. These result in a very high quality of personal and academic support and guidance and mean that all pupils are able to be included in all activities. Support is from a very wide range of professionals, including speech and language therapists, art and music therapists. Transition to mainstream school is extremely well supported so pupils are fully prepared for this.

The school protects pupils from harm and has very good systems to do this. It has responded positively to the new safeguarding requirements. It has pupils' personal needs clearly at heart and for instance, the morning workout aids pupils' concentration, as well as their health.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher leads and manages exceptionally well. She has created a highly effective senior management team which is cohesive in its approach, yet is challenging to ensure the very best for pupils is achieved. Governors are extremely supportive and knowledgeable; they are also highly challenging, leaving no stone unturned in the pursuit of excellence. Through senior staff's focus on research in education, the extensive work that is done in supporting other schools, and because of staff's high degree of expertise in working with pupils with learning difficulties, this school stays ahead of the game.

It knows what it needs to do to improve because its systems for checking are exceptionally broad and highly informative. Subject leaders are very knowledgeable about the strengths and weaknesses of their subjects. The school uses the information exceedingly well to change practice and to make things better for pupils. Vast change and improvement has occurred since the last inspection and pupils say the school is an even better place to be.

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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 quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

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	1
The attendance of learners	1
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?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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.

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	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

29 November 2006

Dear Pupils

Woolgrove School, Pryor Way, Letchworth, Hertfordshire, SG6 2PT

What a really good school you have! You do it proud. I told Mrs Walton that I thought it was an excellent school which helps you really improve in all aspects of your lives.

Thank you for meeting with me and talking to me about school life and your great enjoyment of it.

I was most impressed with the way:

- you work very hard and listen particularly well in lessons;
- you make such an extremely good contribution to your school to help improve things;
- you like to be challenged with hard work; I was amazed at Year 6 pupils' response to their science lesson on air resistance and 'drag' and how they could modify designs to reduce this; and
- you get on really well with one another and show sensitivity for each other's needs.

I have asked Mrs Walton to:

- improve the way ICT is planned so you have more opportunities to learn and progress in the subject.

George Derby

Lead inspector