

Inspection report
Woodcroft School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 881/6031

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 8 - 11 May 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Woodcroft School is an independent day school for primary aged pupils with a range of severe, profound or complex learning difficulties including autistic spectrum disorder. The school opened in 1963 and subsequently gained approved status. A board of directors administers the school for Woodcroft School Ltd. Currently there are 32 pupils on roll, 29 boys and 3 girls. One of the pupils is below compulsory school age and attends part-time. All pupils were referred and funded by their local authority (LA) and all have a statement of their special educational need (SEN). Most pupils come from inner London boroughs and a minority are from outer London suburban areas. Almost all of the pupils attend Woodcroft full-time but increasingly by special arrangement a number attend part-time and are dual registered. Some have their needs met through outreach work in their neighbourhood schools. Attainment on entry is well below that expected for the pupils' ages. Woodcroft is committed to inclusive education and aims to deliver a programme of personalised education, including the National Curriculum, for each of its pupils.

Summary of main findings

Woodcroft School is a very good school with some excellent features. The school meets its stated aims and all of the requirements of the regulations. The school's managers are highly innovative and have a clear vision for its future development. This results in excellent care for its pupils and very good provision for their health, safety and well-being. The school provides a broad, highly enriched curriculum, which is suitably matched to pupils' needs and its comprehensive assessments monitor their progress very effectively. Greater use could be made of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance pupils' learning in some areas. Very good teaching ensures that the pupils make good and sometimes very good progress and achieve well. At the heart of the school's work is the promotion of pupils' self-esteem and independence so that they gain in confidence as they increase their skills in language and communication. The school has an extremely well qualified and experienced multi-disciplinary staff team who work hard, know their pupils very well and prepare them well for the next stage of their education. There are strong links with the community and excellent communication with parents and carers who strongly support the school.

What the school does well:

- it enables pupils to derive the greatest benefit from the curriculum offered by identifying the most appropriate learning style for individuals. Very good

teaching results in good learning because teachers address these learning styles very well;

- it provides very effectively for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepares them well for the next stage of learning;
- it has very good provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety and excellent provision for their care;
- its assessment of pupils' academic achievement as well as their physical, social and personal development is comprehensive, and the information is used well to set targets for improvement;
- it ensures that the teamwork between all the adults involved in teaching and supporting pupils including parents is very good. As a result, pupils grow in confidence and improve their self-esteem; and
- it makes very good use of the accommodation and local resources to provide flexible facilities for teaching and learning.

What must the school do in order to comply with the regulations?

The school meets all the statutory requirements.

Next Steps

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development:

- make use of ICT to support pupils' learning in more areas of the curriculum.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is excellent and considerable care has gone into ensuring that the learning opportunities provided closely match pupils' social and educational needs. Very good levels of staffing within the classroom ensure that pupils receive a highly individualised curriculum that takes very good account of their communication and attention difficulties and delayed play development. The widespread use of visual communication systems, such as Makaton and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), makes a significant contribution to the development of pupils' communication and social skills.

The curriculum policy is comprehensive and there is a clear focus on developing pupils' skills in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. There is limited use of ICT in some subject areas. Pupils receive the National Curriculum and teachers' planning is based on published schemes of work. The school is recognising the need to formalise individual subject policies, several of which are in draft form. There is a strong emphasis on practical and active learning and the school makes very good use of its diverse links with the local and wider community. For example, the school participates in the 'Building Bridges' programme which is organised through the Epping Forest schools consortium. This initiative is geared towards creating opportunities for pupils to socialise with peers in mainstream schools, with a view to raising their achievement in literacy.

In addition, through the Links programme, pupils use sporting facilities at the local leisure centre, go horse riding and learn to play tennis. They also visit the town library and supermarkets and use the church for the annual Christmas play. The Creative Arts programme is enhanced by well-established links with the London Symphony Orchestra. Pupils also experience live music by visiting the Barbican and through specialist musicians visiting the school.

All pupils have access to therapists on a one-to-one basis or as part of a group. These include occupational therapy, physiotherapy, music therapy and blocks of speech and language therapy and these form an important element of the school's provision. The school also provides specialist advice and outreach support for pupils in mainstream education.

The personal, social and health education programme (PSHE) forms an integral part of school life and it helps pupils to stay safe and healthy. There is a strong emphasis on the development of social skills and self-awareness, independence skills and personal relationships. Assemblies and circle times are used effectively so that pupils can share experiences and become more aware of each other's needs.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is very good overall and there are examples of excellent teaching. This ensures that pupils achieve well and make good progress. Teachers

and therapists have a clear understanding of the physical and emotional needs of their pupils as well as their individual special learning needs. They modify the curriculum skilfully and plan tasks well to reflect pupils' individual needs. They use a wide range of teaching strategies to motivate and engage pupils in learning. Those with additional needs are supported very well. All pupils are taught English and mathematics daily. Staff use alternative modes of communication effectively, such as PECS or Makaton signing, to help those with impaired language to fully engage in learning. As a result of this personalised approach, pupils acquire a good range of basic skills in speaking, listening, writing and the use of number, and their reading skills improve as they move through the school. Pupils have access to specialist teaching in a number of areas including music, swimming, trampoline and French. Specialist staff also provide therapeutic programmes and these contribute well to pupils' learning. Throughout the school pupils' behaviour is managed skilfully. As part of the incentive scheme, pupils identify the reward towards which they wish to work at the beginning of each lesson. This encourages them to take some responsibility for their learning and behaviour. Most behave well in class, move calmly around the school and greet visitors with a warm and friendly smile.

A strength of the school is its commitment to the professional development of its staff. In addition to the support and training provided by the headteacher, they have access to a wide range of local and national training opportunities. This influences the quality of the teaching and benefits the pupils.

The teamwork of all adults who work in the classroom is very good. Learning support assistants and therapists work closely with teachers and make a valuable contribution to both the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. Teaching assistants have very good relationships with the pupils and their parents. They know the pupils so well that they are able to assist with individual programmes. The parents acknowledged the contribution made by all the staff to their children's increased confidence and self-esteem.

There are very sound procedures for checking how well pupils are doing. Teachers regularly and systematically assess how much pupils have learned. This enables them to plan effectively for future learning. The school carries out an assessment of pupils' attainment on admission. This, combined with the information received prior to their placement, provides the school with a clear baseline from which to set targets for improvement. Each pupil's individual education plan is regularly reviewed to chart their progress in targeted areas from the time of admission. A regular evaluation is made of progress in all curriculum areas, and this information is used for termly reports, annual reviews and end-of-year reports. Records are well organised, and the end-of-year reports provide parents with a complete overview of pupils' achievements and progress in all subjects.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social and cultural development is very good. The school maintains a Christian ethos whilst celebrating the values, customs and traditions of other world faiths. Pupils have many opportunities in lessons for reflection on ideas, experiences and moral issues. Lessons are conducted in a very peaceful, purposeful atmosphere. The reflective time at the end of the day or during assemblies enables pupils to think about their family and friends and share their achievements and experiences with others.

Staff provide very good role models, both by example and by encouraging pupils to make appropriate choices and take responsibility for their actions and behaviour. This is a significant feature of the PSHE programme. As a consequence, pupils increase in self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence while they are at the school. There is very good evidence of pupils working for others, including the efforts they give to fund-raising for Comic Relief.

The range of activities, both within and outside school, makes a very positive contribution to pupils' social development. Pupils are encouraged to work together in small groups, learning to share and care for each other. They participate in a wide range of educational activities off-site, including physical education lessons at the leisure centre, theatre trips, shopping trips and walks in the local forest. Opportunities for pupils' cultural development are well integrated within the subjects of the curriculum. Lessons in French, humanities and religious education, for example, provide opportunities for pupils to learn about the customs, beliefs and festivals of other cultures as well as their own.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes very good provision for the health, safety and well-being of its pupils. Procedures for child protection, risk assessment and for safeguarding pupils' health and safety are rigorous. Regular training helps to keep everyone informed and members of staff clearly understand their individual responsibilities. The school is keen to ensure that pupils eat sensibly. Wherever possible, food served at the school is fresh, locally sourced and organic. School lunches are supplied by a local organic farm.

There is a clear, consistent and very effective approach to managing behaviour and any instances of bullying. When appropriate, physical restraint is used and all such instances are recorded. Staff know the pupils very well and this helps to ensure that they are able to monitor behaviour and intervene at an early stage, as and when necessary. Pupils who become agitated or upset are encouraged to request 'time out' so that they can calm down. Generous levels of staffing ensure that pupils are very well supervised. Procedures for ensuring pupils' safety and security during the school day, as well as arrival and departure times, are excellent.

Medical advice and treatment are readily available. There is a full-time school nurse and provision for pupils with medical conditions is very good. She undertakes home visits and willingly shares her expertise with parents. School staff frequently accompany parents when they attend hospital appointments and parents speak most highly of the way the school helps them in their dealings with community health professionals. Specialist staff, including the home-school partnership co-ordinator, speech and language therapists, occupational therapist and physiotherapist, also provide a range of support. Parents are invited to attend monthly meetings of the parents' support group and this provides a useful forum through which parents can exchange views and share information. Arrangements for the registration of admission and attendance are efficient and meet the requirements. The school complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

Careful and thorough recruitment procedures have been established by the proprietors, which ensure that staff appointed to the school have undergone appropriate checks. Clearance is obtained from the Criminal Records Bureau for all staff prior to the confirmation of their appointment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is a former private house that has been extended and adapted to suit its current use. It provides a welcoming and homely atmosphere for pupils, which is calming and very conducive to learning.

The two main buildings are close to each other but are separated by a small playground. The five classrooms are compact in size and this suits the pupils' needs well. Classrooms are split into two separate teaching areas and each has its own kitchen from which lunch is served. There is a range of other rooms to support the needs of pupils, including four therapy rooms and a resource centre. Externally, there is a pleasant garden, a wooden playhouse and two paved play areas. The school makes very good use of facilities off-site and pupils attend regular sessions at the local adventure playground, gymnasium, sports centre and tennis club.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides an excellent range of information for parents and carers. The attractive brochure contains a wealth of information about the school's ethos and aims as well as its educational provision.

Parents are very pleased with the work of the school and all who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire stated that they felt that they are kept well-informed about their children's progress. Home-school books are used very effectively. Parents very much appreciate the excellent lines of communication between school and home and say that staff go above and beyond the call of duty. Each term, the school provides parents with written reports that detail their children's progress. Parents also receive copies of the annual review documentation and these help to keep them exceptionally well informed. Additional contact with parents takes place through termly newsletters the parents' handbook, home visits and interactive workshops.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy, which sets out appropriate procedures, responsibilities and timescales for dealing with complaints.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Woodcroft School
DfES Number:	881/6031
Type of school:	Special
Status:	Independent approved
Age range of pupils:	4 - 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 28 Girls: 3 Total: 31
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 1 Girls: 0 Total: 1
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 29 Girls: 3 Total: 32
Annual fees (day pupils):	£42,935
Address of school:	Whitakers Way Baldwins Hill Loughton Essex IG10 1SQ
Telephone number:	0208 508 1369
Fax number:	0208 502 4855
Email address:	mail@woodcroftschoo.net
Headteacher:	Mrs Margaret Newton
Proprietor:	Woodcroft School Ltd
Reporting Inspector:	Sheila A Boyle
Date of inspection:	8 - 11 May 2006

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