

Woodlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113644
Local Authority	Plymouth [113644]
Inspection number	311322
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vernon Pinches
Headteacher	Andrea Hemmens
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Bodmin Road Whitleigh Plymouth PL5 4DZ
Telephone number	01752 300101
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Age group	2-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Woodlands is a day and boarding school for pupils of all abilities whose main difficulties are physical. Many also have additional medical, sensory, communication and learning needs. There is a growing shift in the school's population towards greater complexity of need, and, therefore, pupils' attainment on entry is increasingly well below average. Almost all pupils have a statement of special educational need; the others are undergoing statutory assessment. Pupils' backgrounds reflect the diverse nature of the school's wide catchment area across Devon, Cornwall and Plymouth itself. The great majority are of White British heritage; very few speak English as an additional language.

The school has a long-established outreach team that provides advice, support, equipment and training to nearly half the schools in the city. The school moves into new, purpose built accommodation on the Wood View Learning Community Campus in the autumn. It will share this inclusive setting with a children's centre, a primary school, a young parents unit, a sports college and a wide range of other community facilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Woodlands is a good school where pupils make exceptional progress in their personal and social development as a result of outstanding care and guidance. Pupils' enjoyment of every aspect of the school's provision is reflected in the enthusiasm with which they tackle even the most challenging activities and tasks that staff set. The outcome, over time, is that they grow in confidence, acquire increasingly greater independence and develop a strong desire to participate in the wide range of available learning and social opportunities available. Parents acknowledge the impact of the school and value the exceptional pastoral support they and their children receive. As one parent commented, 'My child has progressed so much at this school ...they have given me hope for the future'.

Standards are well below those expected for pupils of a similar age, but this is because of the learning difficulties and/or disabilities they have. Pupils do, though, make good progress and achieve well because they are taught well. Provision in the Foundation Stage is exceptional and children get a flying start to their education. Those that stay in the school go on to make solidly good progress across all subjects. Older pupils study successfully for a wide range of accredited courses, including GCSE and the National Skills Profile. The most recent results in these were some of the best ever. Teachers are ambitious for their pupils and plan activities carefully to stretch them, although individual progress targets are not always linked well to the aims of the lesson. Staff use an impressive array of specialist techniques to promote learning for those with the most complex needs. The assessment of progress in the small steps that these pupils make is thorough, but the school recognises that further work is required to ensure that all available information is used to best effect to inform the planning of the next steps in learning.

The school has a good curriculum that provides a broad and relevant diet of activities, which are carefully adapted to meet the very wide range of ability in the school. Pupils enjoy the numerous clubs and other events that challenge them and enrich their experience. Some spend time in mainstream schools to enhance a particular skill, some to enjoy the company of their peers and some to prepare for eventual transfer there. This latter group is supported by staff from the excellent outreach service when they do transfer. Over 100 pupils at any time, together with their teachers, benefit from the service's highly valued advice and guidance.

There have been significant improvements since the last inspection, most especially in provision for and applied use of information and communication technology (ICT), assessment procedures and the overall quality of teaching and learning. The previous headteacher's dynamic leadership, which brought about these changes, has been built on very successfully by the acting headteacher. Following the development priorities identified through the school's effective self-evaluation, she is leading the crucially important process of restructuring the curriculum, to meet the rapidly changing character and needs of the school's pupils more effectively. The recently formed federated governing body, whose brief it is to provide governance for the whole Wood View Learning Community Campus, is already demonstrating robust and effective support and challenge. The school is now very well placed to make a significant collaborative contribution to this new venture.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The enthusiasm and 'can do' philosophy of the nursery staff is infectious, influencing both children and their parents to think positively about what can be achieved. Children's needs are quickly assessed and very specific interventions are employed to concentrate on developing their physical, social, emotional, play and communication skills. This enables them to make exceptional progress, often in very small steps. Parents are helped and encouraged to work in partnership with staff to consolidate this learning. A number will already have attended the Aquatots swimming group with their children before attending the Nursery. Some children make sufficient progress to transfer on to mainstream schools at age five and some go to other more suitable special schools.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The team that inspected boarding provision concurrently with this inspection found that all minimum standards are fully met and care is of at least good quality overall. It was clear from the focus of the inspectors' own enquiries that those pupils from the school who stay in residence for varying lengths of time benefit from the strong emphasis placed on consolidating their independence and social skills through their participation in a wide range of activities. There are strong links between school and residential staff, ensuring continuity of care. However, arrangements for sharing pupils' learning targets are not so well defined, which means that the efforts of the school day are not always followed up consistently during the evening.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make better use of existing information to plan pupils' learning.
- Urgently complete the planned restructuring of the curriculum in collaboration with partner schools on the new campus.
- Ensure that the planning of activities in the boarding provision fully reflects the priority targets identified in school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Boys and girls of all ages make good progress whatever their starting points and learning difficulties. This is because they are taught well and given good levels of support. There are particular strengths in the arts, communication skills, physical education and ICT. Progress in English is not quite as strong as in mathematics and science, but even so, it is still good. Staff are currently exploring the reasons for this and how the situation can be improved. Pupils' achievements have improved considerably since the last inspection, as underlying weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum have been dealt with. The school has expanded the range of accredited courses, and older pupils across the ability range now leave with a good range of awards that celebrate their achievements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

From an early age, pupils are given many opportunities and are always encouraged to take responsibility appropriate to their capability. For example, two older pupils organised and ran

a hockey game for their peers which demonstrated how well they were able to use skills they had been taught. The school council is a highly effective body that represents the views of pupils and has a measurable impact on the quality of life within the school. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem are raised considerably by the success of this, and they feel important and valued within the school. Pupils are encouraged to think of the needs of others and often organise well thought out fund raising activities. The school has impressive links with several overseas schools, and has gained recognition for this activity. The link with Ghana has led pupils to set up a mini-enterprise activity to sell handmade goods brought back from a visit. All of these skills prepare pupils well for life beyond school. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and attend well, only missing for medical reasons or to attend respite care.

The school provides a secure environment where pupils feel safe and well cared for. They are also well aware of how to keep themselves safe from harm. Relationships between pupils and with staff are excellent and behaviour is exemplary. Pupils understand the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle and make sensible choices at meal times. They are encouraged to become physically active. Sports leaders help in the development of activities that are accessible to pupils, who are certainly enthusiastic, for example, about using the machines in the exercise suite. The school has gained Healthy School status in recognition of its effectiveness in this area. Residential and day visits, and sharing lessons with their peers in mainstream schools, all contribute well towards pupils' social development and active integration into the wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers and their able assistants work in effective partnerships to support pupils' learning. Pupils are engaged well in lessons and participate fully because activities are usually planned effectively to provide appropriate challenge. Resources are appealing and lessons have pace and variety. Occasionally, however, tasks are too easy or difficult for a small number of pupils because assessment information has not been used in the most effective way in planning. The right level of support and regular praise help to keep pupils motivated. The school's full commitment to monitoring teaching, providing focused guidance and support where necessary and offering wide-ranging training opportunities have all contributed to the notable improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum makes learning exciting for pupils, whilst taking full account of the need to balance the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, medical, communication and sensory needs of pupils. Links with specialist staff are planned well to ensure that pupils do not miss out on their lessons because of health concerns. Pupils enjoy their work in lessons and all the many extra enrichment activities they experience, both in school and out in the wider community. The school has been awarded the Gold Artsmark for its high quality involvement in festivals, music and drama and the very impressive artwork its pupils regularly produce. Older pupils also participate in regional sporting and team events such as the Ten Tors and Kielder Challenges. The task of redesigning the curriculum to take full account of all the changes the school is currently experiencing is clearly demanding. An important element to take account of in this

process is that provision for work-related learning and skills for life is not as good as it could be.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There is a clear focus on meeting the needs of the individual pupil, which results in excellent provision for pastoral care. Parents are unanimous in the view that their children are extremely well cared for. Staff, therapists and specialist agencies work together exceptionally well to ensure this happens. Staff are trained to a high standard by health professionals to give them the skills they need to manage the medical requirements of pupils. A recent audit has identified the change in need of pupils entering the school. A training programme is already in place and additional staff employed to meet those needs. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and effective. There is sensitivity in the allocation of staff to pupils to ensure their dignity is maintained at all times. Very good links with external agencies and parents make sure that the more vulnerable pupils are extremely well supported. The school offers comprehensive support and training to parents to give them the confidence to provide for their child at home. Arrangements for transition planning are very good, incorporating appropriate careers advice, and pupils are actively involved in the process. They choose their courses and colleges for their post-16 studies. Systems for tracking their progress are very good and properly challenging targets are identified for them to achieve in their studies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The acting headteacher has provided energetic and well focused leadership during the current period of significant change that the school is experiencing. She has encouraged colleagues to be reflective about their own areas of responsibility and the contribution they can make to a whole-school, collaborative approach to managing change. Her work, for example, with the extended senior leadership team, consisting of a group of middle managers representing all aspects of the school, and her encouragement of senior teaching assistants to take on support and management of colleagues' work, are typical of her commitment to developing a sharing culture. Staff recognise, however, that there is still some way to go before this approach is fully effective. A comprehensive programme of continuing professional development and training throughout the year is a concrete manifestation of why staff morale is high and produces a willing readiness to 'make the next bit work'. This shift is not happening in isolation because much good work is being done to develop strong working relationships with colleagues across the new campus. The new federated governing body is providing a strong lead in change management and actively modelling how best to cope with new challenges.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	2

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?	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your help during our visit. We felt very welcome and really enjoyed talking to so many of you and watching you work so hard. We agree with you and your parents that yours is a good school. You said how much you enjoy it and we could see this for ourselves.

- These are some of the things that impressed us.
- Staff have high expectations of you and you are all treated as individuals.
- Good teaching and an interesting range of tasks and activities help you to make good progress in your studies. This means that you get good results in your courses by the time you leave.
- You all become much more confident and capable young people because staff are hugely kind and supportive.
- Members of the school council make a real difference to the school and help you to understand how important it is for you to use opportunities responsibly to become as independent as possible.
- Planning for the move to your new school on the Wood View Learning Community Campus in the autumn has been thorough and thoughtful.
- The headteacher has made a real difference in a short time to how all the staff work together to give you the best chance.

- These are the things that we think the school could do to improve.
- Make better use of what staff know about you to plan your learning programmes.
- Develop a new curriculum as soon as possible to take account of all the changes that are happening to the school.
- Make sure that the planning of activities in the boarding provision takes more account of your school targets.

We hope that you continue to do your bit to make the school even better. This will be particularly important later in the year when you all move.



8 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Woodlands School, Plymouth PL5 4DZ

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Yours sincerely

Steve Parker
Lead inspector