

Woodlands Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119871
Local Authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	313434
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	John Atkinson

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	79
6th form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Graham Fletcher
Headteacher	Mr Sam Forde
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2005
School address	Whitegate Drive Blackpool Lancashire FY3 9HF
Telephone number	01253 316722
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Woodlands School is a school for students and pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and those on the autistic spectrum. Students and pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. The percentage of those entitled to free school meals is well above the national average and has been rising in recent years.

Most pupils are White British and a small proportion are from other ethnic backgrounds. There are a small number of looked after children. All students and pupils have a statement of special educational need. A high proportion of primary aged pupils attend the school's resource base at St John Vianney Primary School for part of their work depending on their individual needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that provides excellent value for money. It continues to build on its long-standing excellent practice and has improved very much since its last inspection and has excellent capacity to improve. Meticulous attention is paid to ensuring that each individual's personal development and well-being are at the heart of what the school does. The effect is that students and pupils look forward to, and really enjoy, everything the school has to offer. As a result, they grow in self-confidence, develop a hungry appetite for learning and become increasingly independent.

The school is extremely successful because of the consistently high quality of leadership, teaching, care and support. The very positive ethos of the school generates an optimistic view of every individual's ability to reach their potential, regardless of their special needs, and attracts the overwhelming support and confidence of the parents and carers. One parental response was typical of the many comments expressed to the lead inspector. 'The progress made by my child has been unbelievable, not only educationally but also socially as well.'

Students' and pupils' achievements are outstanding. Children get off to a flying start in the Foundation Stage and this is built upon throughout the school. The school is exceptionally strong in assessing each student's and pupil's needs, setting personally ambitious and challenging targets and then carefully tracking and monitoring their progress. Individuals achieve particularly well in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy and in personal and social education, resulting in everyone being very well prepared in becoming as independent as possible. Progress is exceptional because the quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers' planning is very detailed and learning activities are tailored to each individual's needs. All staff have very high expectations of what students and pupils can achieve. Teachers work extremely effectively with teaching assistants to ensure that individual care and support are focused on ensuring that learning takes place at the fastest possible rate. The school has an excellent system for measuring and recording progress each year and the overall outcome is that all students and pupils reach their full potential in accredited courses. A particular strength is the way that staff use an excellent range of innovative techniques and aids to ensure that those with the most complex needs learn to communicate effectively. As a result, they have equal access to learning and make excellent progress.

Students' and pupils' personal development is outstanding. All feel extremely safe in school and many comment on how easy and reassuring it is to share any anxieties with adults. The respect and trust that students and pupils have for adults and each other foster a willingness in them to take risks and undertake new experiences with confidence. This is perfectly illustrated in how students look forward to, enjoy and succeed in their work experience placements. As a result, they are really well prepared for their future life and this is amply demonstrated by the fact that when students leave, all are successfully placed in education, employment or training. The school is very effective in giving students and pupils the information and options about how to live a healthy lifestyle and everyone has excellent opportunities to enjoy physical exercise, including swimming. Given this high level of personal attention and support, it is no surprise that attendance is good and everybody is beaming with enthusiasm when they arrive at school.

The curriculum is outstanding because of the way it is adapted to meet individual needs. It is really well enhanced through visits, visitors and extra-curricular activities. There is a creative

approach to how the curriculum is taught and the use of different themes to link subjects together is most effective in making learning interesting and fun. The school is building on this success by exploring ways of developing a more cohesive curriculum for the students between the ages of 14 and 19.

Leadership and management are outstanding and underpin the school's continuous drive for improvement and its extremely positive ethos. The excellent programme for professional development is instrumental in maintaining staff commitment and enthusiasm and ensures the highest quality of provision. The school has built excellent links with a partner primary school and as a result, the highest quality inclusive practice is available to all primary aged pupils. Similar experiences are not available for secondary aged pupils.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The provision in the Further Education Unit is outstanding. It is particularly effective in promoting students' independence and giving them the skills to participate in the wider community with greater confidence and ambition. As a result, their achievement is excellent, both academically and personally. The curriculum is innovative and challenging because of the range of highly relevant courses that are available to meet the individual needs of students. Teaching is of a consistently high quality and the relationships between adults and students are outstanding. There are very high expectations of students and they respond accordingly with maturity and determination. Leadership of the unit is outstanding and particular emphasis is given to ensuring that students have full access to appropriate work placements. Students are given outstanding guidance and support in completing accredited courses and developing the skills necessary to access work experience, future college places and employment opportunities. As a result, students are extremely well prepared for adult life and transition to post-school placements.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision in the Foundation Stage is outstanding and children get off to a flying start. Their needs are assessed very quickly and a wide range of learning activities are planned to meet their individual needs. Children are given a very high standard of personal attention, care and support and this leads to outstanding progress in all areas of learning. The very attractive learning environment and the stimulating resources that are available combine to capture children's imagination and as a result they make rapid progress in communication and personal development. Staff are very astute in checking children's progress and use this information effectively to plan the next stage of a child's development, thus ensuring that children have excellent opportunities to build upon what they are learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend to older pupils and students the current opportunities made available and enjoyed by primary aged pupils to access mainstream schools and activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students and pupils achieve excellently in communication skills, speaking and listening, numeracy and science. Pupils achieve very well in creative subjects such as music and art because of the innovative ways in which these subjects are taught. They also achieve well in physical education where there is a strong emphasis on promoting confidence in swimming, participating in outdoor activities and exercising regularly. Students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form achieve very well in their accredited courses such as the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network Transition Challenge. Pupils of all abilities make very good progress in information and communication technology (ICT) which in turn helps their progress in other areas of learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students and pupils make outstanding progress in their personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The excellent ethos and relationships between staff and young people lead to everyone feeling secure, safe and relaxed resulting in exemplary behaviour. Attendance is good and everyone enjoys coming to school. The structured reward system and extensive opportunities to participate in community activities are very effective in building and boosting students' and pupils' self-esteem, confidence and understanding of the wider world. This is very evident in the school's excellent international links that give pupils the opportunity to travel to different countries and share experiences with young people from different cultures. Pupils have many opportunities to experience how to live a healthy lifestyle. By the end of the sixth form they are exceptionally well prepared for the next phase of their life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching is outstanding and leads to excellent gains in learning. Specialist teaching techniques and communication aids are used very effectively in making learning exciting, capturing and sustaining pupils' interest and involvement. Teachers have very high expectations, plan very carefully to ensure that everyone is fully included in the learning and manage challenging behaviour really well. Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together in establishing a very positive classroom ethos and providing excellent levels of personal care and support. Students and pupils enjoy the tasks that are set because they are interesting and challenging and just at the right level for them to do. In every lesson individuals are pushed to meet their personal targets and this sustains very positive attitudes towards learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum and its enrichment are outstanding. There is a very wide range of opportunities for students and pupils to participate in. Choice is central to their enjoyment of the curriculum and fosters their independence skills. The excellent opportunities for work experience are enormously influential in motivating students, widening their horizons and raising their aspirations with the effect that there is a growing confidence and desire to go on to further education and training. The excellent links with a local primary school partner enables individuals to access a mainstream curriculum and mix with a wider group of pupils resulting in considerable gains in social and communications skills. However, similar opportunities are not yet available for all older students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

This is a very caring, safe and supportive school where individuals feel totally valued and respected. Child protection arrangements and those to ensure everyone's health, welfare and safety are very securely in place. Arrangements to safeguard pupils are extremely thorough and this means that the most vulnerable or at risk are given high quality personal care and support. Staff are very thorough in how they guide individuals to ensure that the targets they set for students and pupils are met. The sensitivity of staff and the support they give means that pupils do not feel overawed by the challenges they face and become even more determined to succeed. Parents overwhelmingly feel that their children are well cared for and are delighted with the progress they make as a result of the attention of the staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership in setting out a clear vision for the school. He is constantly promoting and responding to new initiatives so that the school remains at the forefront of best practice. He receives total support from members of the senior leadership team who are excellent role models in their own practice. The deputy headteacher is outstanding in tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils and using this data to set challenging targets. Governors support and challenge the school effectively. The high quality of leadership and management throughout the school results in a very strong staff team that strives for excellence and takes full advantage of the excellent opportunities for professional development. The outcome is a staff team with high morale and total commitment. In addition, the school has extremely thorough procedures to evaluate its own strengths and areas that it needs to improve. As a result, it has an excellent capacity to improve further.

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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	16-19
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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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	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

17 September 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Woodlands Special School, Blackpool, FY3 9HF

Thank you very much for making me so welcome for the two days when I came to visit your school. I was very impressed by how well you get on with each other and help each other in class. You all seem to enjoy coming to school and this is no surprise because you have the opportunity to do so many interesting things. The students in the Further Education Unit impressed me with their success in work experiences and the fact that some of them do so well that they are asked back. I soon discovered from my discussions with you that you are all hard working and keen to do well. I know that the staff at the school also want you to be successful and they are the main reason that you have such a good time at school. You are very fortunate that the staff are prepared to give up so much time to make sure that you have trips and visits, including going to Germany so as you can see your friends who were visiting you during the inspection. Your school is outstanding because:

- the staff have high expectations of you, you respond enthusiastically and achieve excellently
- you are all treated as individuals and receive excellent care and support
- you have great opportunities to learn new and interesting things
- the headteacher is always trying to get the very best for you.

It is really important that you make the best out of the opportunities school provides for you because then you will make really good progress and have better chances when you leave.

I have discussed with the head what the school can do to get even better and we agreed that it is very important that older pupils should also have more opportunities to do some of their learning in a local school like the younger ones do at St John Vianney's.

What I hope is that you all carry on working hard and enjoying school. I know that you are very determined young people and I wish you well for the future

Best wishes

John Atkinson

Lead inspector