

Woodcroft School

Independent Special School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	881/6031
Unique Reference Number	115425
Inspection number	332449
Inspection dates	10 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Woodcroft School is an independent day special school in Loughton, Essex. It opened in 1963 and makes provision for up to 36 pupils aged between two and 11 years, almost all of whom have a statement of special educational needs to meet their complex learning difficulties. There are currently 35 pupils on the roll of the school aged between four and 12 years. This includes two Year 7 pupils under a transition arrangement with a local authority. The school has recently admitted children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition to the full time education provided, the school has outreach and training arrangements and works in close partnership with a number of local authorities. The school is committed to inclusion and to being recognised as a centre of excellence. It aims to offer 'a safe and supportive environment within which pupils can develop to their full potential and live healthy, satisfying lives within society'. The school was last inspected in May 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Woodcroft School provides a good quality of education and makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It has high expectations of its pupils and a focus on continuing improvement. Pupils benefit from a multidisciplinary approach. Staff work together well to provide a safe, well-ordered environment within which pupils can develop their learning and communication. Parents and placing authorities are pleased with the education and support provided for their children. The school meets all of the regulations and is successful in meeting its aims.

Quality of education

The school provides a good quality of education including that for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The good curriculum is enhanced by the provision and integration of a range of therapies. Policies clearly show that the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of those who have autistic spectrum disorders or other speech and language difficulties. However, not all policies are clearly dated and/or reviewed. The curriculum is personalised for each pupil to reflect their specific needs and fully meets the requirements of their statement of special educational needs.

There is an appropriate focus on developing core skills as well as providing the full range of other subjects.

The school makes good use of local facilities for sport and pupils benefit from a very good range of physical activities, including trampolining, horse riding and swimming. They also go for walks and make use of the environment of Epping Forest to extend their educational experiences. Good, practical opportunities for pupils, which promote the school's multi-sensory approach, include growing seeds, cooking and using clay. In addition to the music and music therapy provided by the school pupils have further opportunities to play musical instruments for example, during visits by members of the London Symphony Orchestra.

The school has improved its use of information and communication technology since the last inspection. Evidence of this is seen in its specific inclusion in lessons. Pupils are also given practical opportunities to develop their skills in activities, such as digital photography and telephoning the school nurse. Greater use of photographic records and the interactive whiteboard has also come about through whole school training.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Knowledgeable staff plan well to meet pupils' needs, making good use of individual education and behaviour support plans. This is also evident for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There is a continuing focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. In the best lessons teachers make lively presentations which engage pupils and use good questioning which enables all pupils to participate. There is some excellent use of multi-sensory approaches. Teachers pay close attention to individual preferences and good use is made of speech and language therapy programmes. Signs and symbols are used consistently by staff. The challenging behaviour exhibited by some pupils is managed very well. Occasionally activities are rushed: not all pupils get a turn and transition between activities does not run smoothly. There are very good relationships between staff and pupils and high levels of staffing ensure pupils get good support when needed. Teaching assistants are particularly skilful and successful in promoting independent learning. Pupils are keen to be independent and tell staff if they do not need help.

The classroom environment is designed for low arousal and there are small rooms attached to classrooms which enable pupils to take time out. Teachers are highly organised in how they use and store resources. There is a good range of materials and books as well as a small, but well-stocked central library.

The school makes careful, detailed assessments of pupils and includes those made by speech and language occupational therapists. The targets set for both learning and behaviour are carefully linked to pupils' statements; these are regularly evaluated and reviewed. Parents receive this information each term as well as a

detailed report for their children's annual reviews. Pupils, including the youngest children, make good progress. They are assessed against P levels.¹ Small steps in progress are carefully recorded in pupils' individual files with profiles updated to reflect termly progress. At present there is no central analysis which readily shows progress over time. Pupils make good progress in their communication and social skills and develop effective means of communication during their time at the school. Those who speak English as an additional language make particularly good progress. This group clearly benefit from intensive support and make very good gains in their speech and language.

Another measure of the good progress pupils make is shown by their inclusion in local schools and their successful transition to schools in their local area. One placing authority commented on the school's '... excellent transition arrangements for supporting young people onto other provision'. Pupils' attendance often improves during their time at Woodcroft and there have been no exclusions over the past year.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good for pupils of all ages. The school plans carefully for their personal development. Pupils are encouraged to learn more about themselves and how to recognise and manage stress. They have opportunities to consider and celebrate their own and others' achievements in assemblies. There are good opportunities to consider the beliefs of faith groups through religious education and by celebrating festivals from a range of religions, including those reflected in the school's population. Pupils are encouraged to think about the needs of others and have supported the local night shelter and Comic Relief.

In order to meet the specific needs of the pupils there is a carefully ordered regime with clear rules and routines. Good behaviour by pupils is expected and achieved. It is reinforced and rewarded by staff verbally and on pupils' reward charts. Pupils are expected to recognise and manage times when they are finding it difficult to stay in the classroom and exchange their 'Take a Break' cards for a few minutes of supervised respite. Pupils obviously enjoy school and are pleased to be there. Most enjoy meeting visitors and are friendly and welcoming. They are able to take responsibility by being class monitors and contributing to their annual review meetings. There are many good opportunities to develop and extend social skills within the classroom, through sharing meals and on trips. Staff teach pupils to find their way around the school, as most children need to focus on making sense of the environment around them before they can appreciate other locations. There are also regular trips to places within the local community as well as to museums and to London. These trips help pupils build on skills gained in school and begin to

¹ These record attainment for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities working below Level 1 of the National Curriculum.

understand the wider world. At an appropriate time individuals are taught how to travel responsibly on public transport. They learn about public services and make visits, for example to the fire station. Some pupils follow world events such as the recent American presidential elections. The school benefits from having staff and pupils from different cultures, for example when a member of staff shows pupils what a child in Africa might have for lunch.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of all pupils is good. The staff look after pupils well and supervise them carefully throughout the school day. Healthy lifestyles are promoted well and there are very good opportunities for pupils to take part in physical exercise. Pupils demonstrate they know how to make choices of healthy food. The school benefits from having a full time nurse who is able to support parents and pupils, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and provide training for staff. A large number of staff have had first-aid training.

The school has particularly thorough and robust policies and procedures for recruitment which ensure that all the necessary checks are carried out on staff. Staff are alert to any inappropriate physical contact which pupils may seek, for example hugging strangers, and this is noted in risk assessments. Pupils are also taught that those involved in their transport to and from school should wear identification badges.

The school has reviewed its accessibility plan and has a new plan to fully meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The school began to admit children in Early Years Foundation Stage at the start of the current academic year. Teachers and pupils have warmly welcomed these young children and they have been seamlessly absorbed into the day-to-day life of the school. Teachers are long accustomed to planning activities that meet the learning and development needs of each pupil within their class. Their established skills are helping to ensure that these young children settle in quickly, enjoy the time they spend at school and make good progress in their work. Children benefit particularly from classroom activities which are changed regularly. Adults constantly encourage children's participation by respecting the choices they make and by joining in with activities, such as reading a book or playing on the trampoline. Children thoroughly enjoy these opportunities and skilled teaching helps them to make good progress in relation to their starting points. Adults closely observe children's learning and these notes are used effectively to inform lesson planning and children's individual education plans.

The leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are satisfactory. All adults take very good care of children, although the requirements of this framework are not yet fully reflected in school records, policies and procedures.

The well-maintained accommodation is adequate in size and is used effectively. Very good use is made of the outdoor space, although there is no canopy provided which would provide shelter from the sun and rain.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Continue to review, and date, policies to ensure they reflect current practice.
- Develop recording to more clearly demonstrate progress over time and across the school.
- Ensure the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are fully reflected in school records, policies and procedures.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		✓		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		✓		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?		✓		
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?			✓	
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		✓		

School details

Name of school	Woodcroft School		
DCSF number	881/6031		
Unique reference number	115425		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	January 1963		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 30	Girls: 5	Total: 35
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 29	Girls: 3	Total: 32
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 1	Total: 3
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,174		
Address of school	Whitakers Way Baldwin's Hill Loughton Essex IG10 1SQ		
Telephone number	020 8508 1369		
Fax number	020 8502 4855		
Email address	mail@woodcroftschoo.net		
Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Newton		
Proprietor	Woodcroft School limited		
Reporting inspector	Pauline Allison HMI		
Dates of inspection	10 March 2009		