

Woodlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115228
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338543
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1490
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Jones
Headteacher	Mr Andy White
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2007
School address	Takeley End Kingswood Basildon SS16 5BA
Telephone number	01268 282146
Fax number	01268 531655
Email address	woodlands@btconnect.com

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 36 lessons, attended two assemblies and three tutor periods, and held meetings with governors, senior and middle managers, and panels of students from each year group.

Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at achievement data, lesson plans and school improvement plans; records on exclusions, attendance, racist incidents and bullying, policies and procedures for ensuring students' safety, and minutes of meetings; and the school's strategies for promoting equalities and community cohesion. In addition to the parental survey, a sample of students completed a written questionnaire and a staff survey was also conducted.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well students achieve in English and how well they apply literacy skills throughout the curriculum
- how well teachers use their knowledge of individual students to challenge them and help them make good progress in lessons
- the way that the school's Performing Arts specialism is helping to improve students' achievement and personal development
- how well the school cares for and supports students, and how well the school deals with students' needs and concerns.

Information about the school

Woodlands School is much larger than most secondary schools. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. Specialist provision for students with speech and language difficulties is included within the school. Although below-average numbers of students are registered as eligible for free school meals, the school serves an area where there is some significant social and economic deprivation.

The school became a specialist performing arts college in 2005 with dance, drama and music as lead subjects. The school holds the Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark, and Healthy Schools awards, and is also designated as a Training School.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Woodlands is a good school that provides good value for money and has good capacity for making further, sustained improvements. The headteacher, leadership team and staff work hard to create a positive ethos for learning, with high expectations for all. There is outstanding leadership of teaching, with well-planned professional development and clear understanding amongst staff about what makes a good lesson where students learn well. Students make good progress in their personal development. The school actively promotes equal opportunities. However, some management systems for monitoring and evaluating aspects of the school's work, particularly those which are the direct responsibility of the governing body, are only satisfactory.

These are notable strengths of the school:

- Students and staff are very proud to be at Woodlands; students have good attitudes to learning, and good teaching helps them to make good progress in lessons and examination courses.
- Students make particularly good progress in mathematics, and most students take a GCSE course in French or German.
- Students make very good progress in the specialist Performing Arts subjects, and these experiences help them to achieve well in aspects of their personal development, such as making an outstanding contribution to the community.
- There is a wide range of curriculum options available, and students are guided well to choose subjects that will prepare them thoroughly for the next stages of their education or employment.
- The school's leaders and managers set high expectations for behaviour; any inappropriate conduct by students is not tolerated and is dealt with swiftly.
- Support is strong for the most vulnerable students, particularly those with special educational needs or in the care of the local authority.
- The school works effectively with its partners, both to support the most vulnerable students and to make extended opportunities available to the more able.

Aspects of the schools' work that are less effective include:

- Students' writing skills are weaker than their speaking and listening skills, and the quality of presentation is too variable.
- Whilst the school effectively promotes equal opportunities and good behaviour,

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- whole-school systems for evaluating these outcomes are only adequate.
- Similarly, whilst there are some excellent aspects to the school's work in the community, strategies to promote all aspects of community cohesion are also just satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To raise students' achievement further, improve the quality of students' writing throughout the curriculum by:
 - promoting the highest standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar in all lessons and through the marking of students' work
 - ensuring that students take greater care with the presentation of their written work.
- To improve students' personal development further, increase the efficiency of management systems for monitoring outcomes for all groups of young people, including:
 - the governing body's evaluation of the school's equalities policies
 - the analysis of information about students' behaviour across different year groups, to better inform senior leaders and governors
 - the school's strategy for community cohesion.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students arrive at Woodlands having attained broadly average standards in their primary schools. By the end of Year 11 they reach standards that are firmly in line with the national average. The good progress made by students of all abilities or backgrounds was confirmed in lessons seen during the inspection. Students are keen to learn and apply themselves well in class. In mathematics, standards are above average. There is very good take-up for the specialist performing arts subjects, and standards in dance and drama are above average. In the three years prior to 2009, standards in English examinations had been low but the 2009 results showed a clear improvement. This helped just over half of all students to gain five good GCSE passes including the key subjects of English and mathematics for the first time in the school's fifty-year history. Nevertheless, whilst their speaking and listening skills are developing well, the quality of students' writing is variable; for some, literacy difficulties remain a barrier to further success.

Attendance is above average, the result of effective strategies employed by the school. School leaders set high standards and expectations for good behaviour and the great majority of students conduct themselves very well. Whilst the total number of students excluded for inappropriate behaviour is above average, the majority need only to be excluded once for them to learn their lesson. The few students who do not respond as well are largely from lower year groups, and overall exclusion rates decline sharply as students move through the school. Students told inspectors that they understand and appreciate the 'zero-tolerance' line taken.

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Very few parents expressed concerns about students' safety, although a small number raised concerns about bullying. Inspectors found that records are kept efficiently by Heads of Year, showing that reported bullying incidents or other disputes amongst students are logged and dealt with swiftly. Pastoral managers liaise effectively when these issues involve students from different year groups, although there is less detailed analysis of overall behaviour patterns, particularly to inform senior leaders and governors. Anti-bullying guidance and strategies for students are displayed clearly in classrooms, and the school organises additional events such as cyberbullying conferences to raise awareness further. All groups of students that met with inspectors said that they feel respected, feel very safe in school and are confident that there are trusted adults to turn to, should they have concerns.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The majority of teaching is good or outstanding. The best lessons are characterised by:

- teachers' good subject knowledge and classroom management
- skilful questioning techniques that really make students think carefully and deeply
- students' enthusiastic responses, confidently asking questions back to further develop their learning
- students working independently or cooperatively in groups for extended periods.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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In the best lessons there is good knowledge of students' individual needs, and there are some excellent examples of assessment being used in lessons to develop students' thinking. New technologies are used well. For example, in a GCSE music class, students recorded their composition work as an MP3 file, emailed it to their teacher, who in turn returned the work complete with annotated comments and musical examples to explain the steps that could be taken to improve.

A minority of lessons, whilst satisfactory, are not of this high quality because there is a slower pace to learning, less emphasis on meeting individual students' needs, and fewer opportunities for students to work without direction. Similarly, some teachers' marking does not challenge students sufficiently to improve their spelling, punctuation, grammar or presentation.

An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the wide range of academic and vocational qualifications in Key Stage 4, and students are guided to select options that will prepare them thoroughly for their future education or employment. Courses and work-based learning opportunities are offered in partnership with local colleges and employers where appropriate, and there are effective work experience programmes for all students. Extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and the arts, are plentiful and popular. The school has responded to the 2008 Ofsted subject inspection of religious education by providing increased curriculum time in Key Stage 3, although the programme for older students is still short on time. Similarly, whilst increased curriculum time for literacy and English teaching has brought improvements to GCSE English results, students' literacy skills across the curriculum remain a relative weakness.

There is good support for students with specific needs. The proportion of students needing help with learning difficulties reduces as they move through the school, a measure of this support's effectiveness. A large majority of students are from families where there is no tradition of higher education.. The school works hard to overcome any disadvantage that individual students face and has strong links with outside agencies such as the health service, the police, and social services. There is also good provision for the more able students. Induction arrangements for students joining Woodlands from primary schools are effective. While there are some good aspects to the guidance that students receive, particularly in relation to the next steps of their lives, some formal guidance sessions such as the daily form periods are not used effectively.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2
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How effective are leadership and management?

There are some particularly strong features to the school's leadership and management. The headteacher has given dedicated and outstanding leadership throughout the past twenty years, and has led considerable improvements in the school's performance over that time. There is an excellent programme of professional development focussing on teaching and learning, and the school's expertise is shared with schools locally and in other authorities. Good safeguarding systems are in place and good attention is given to students most at risk, for example those who are looked after.

The effectiveness of the way that the school promotes equal opportunities is seen in the equally good progress that all groups of students enjoy. Governors give a loyal, genuine commitment to the school. Nevertheless, strategies that the governing body is required to have in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of its equalities policies require updating, to target even better outcomes for students. Students are given good opportunities to contribute to and benefit from activities in their school and local communities, and the way that they throw themselves into these with great enthusiasm and generosity is outstanding. However, the school's promotion of community cohesion is only satisfactory because there is much less management focus on planning and evaluation, and this prevents students from enjoying even better outcomes, including in their spiritual and cultural development. Similarly, whilst the school's self-evaluation rightly celebrates Woodlands' many strengths, it does not give equally robust analysis to what the school needs to do to improve outcomes further.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection survey said that they were happy with the education and care provided by Woodlands School.

A very small minority of parents raised concerns about the effectiveness with which the school communicates information, or takes account of their suggestions or concerns. Inspectors found that the school has strong communications channels in place; the headteacher is available to parents for an hour before school every day, and also for one evening a week. The school website is informative and up-to-date, and contains the weekly newsletter that is sent home via students. The school works hard to communicate with parents, but recognises that it needs to persist in finding effective ways of communicating with some families, particularly those who are unable to come into school, or do not have access to the internet.

Whilst a very small minority of parents who replied to the inspection survey said they believed that any misbehaviour could be dealt with more consistently by staff, there was little evidence of inconsistency seen by inspectors and students say that any misbehaviour is dealt with firmly and swiftly across the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Woodlands School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 457 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1490 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	149	33	279	61	21	5	5	1
The school keeps my child safe	140	31	289	63	17	4	4	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	121	26	279	61	34	7	2	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	148	32	258	56	24	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	142	31	283	63	10	2	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	110	24	283	62	30	7	5	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	87	19	298	65	43	9	7	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	134	29	238	52	17	4	2	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	134	29	266	58	26	6	5	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	116	25	290	63	37	8	11	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	73	16	289	63	31	7	11	2
The school is led and managed effectively	134	29	279	61	12	3	10	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	178	39	244	53	15	3	8	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement at the end of the first day of inspection. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Woodlands School, Basildon, SS16 5BA

As you know, we recently inspected Woodlands School. The full inspection report is attached to this letter, and should be taken home for your parents. I encourage you to read it, too. I am writing separately to thank you very much for the part that you played in the inspection and, indeed, for the important part that you play in making Woodlands a good school. Your contributions really do make a difference - good attitudes to learning and good behaviour in lessons help your teachers to get on with meeting your individual needs and do a good job for you. Students who leave Woodlands make good progress in their exam courses, and this sets them up well for their future education and careers. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of your academic and vocational education, and this is due in no small part to the strong, dedicated leadership of the headteacher and his team. There are also effective arrangements in place to promote your safety and well-being; you told us that you are respected, there is zero tolerance of inappropriate behaviour, and that there are strict systems in place to deal with misbehaviour when it happens.

I have asked the school to concentrate now on two important matters that will help the school improve even more, and help you to achieve even higher standards in your school work and personal development. Firstly, there needs to be a focus on your writing. Writing is an important skill in all areas of the curriculum, and you can play your part by paying particular attention to your spelling, punctuation and presentation. Secondly, there are some actions that the school's managers, including the governing body, can take to help you make even more progress in your personal development. These include having more detailed plans and opportunities for you to work with people from different backgrounds, and having a better overview of the behaviour of groups of students across the school.

I know that you and your teachers are proud to be part of Woodlands, and I wish you well with your future studies and career plans. Thank you once again, and well done.

Yours faithfully

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

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