

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Woodlands Secondary School

Northwell Drive, Luton, Bedfordshire LU3 3SP

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Inspection dates:

23 and 24 November 2022

## **Outcome**

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a happy and welcoming school. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Pupils benefit from the broad and rich curriculum that is well suited to their individual needs and aspirations. Pupils gain the knowledge and skills that prepare them well for adulthood. They learn to be confident in social situations and in the routines of daily life. They learn to communicate effectively. However, some pupils do not develop their confidence and fluency in reading as well as they could. This limits their independence in reading and in writing.

Pupils are friendly and polite. They say that staff help them to resolve any worries they may have. Pupils learn to regulate their behaviour when they become anxious or distressed. Bullying is rare. Pupils understand how to make positive choices. They know how to keep themselves and others safe, including when online. Pupils take seriously their responsibilities as members of the school and eco-councils or in running the tuck shop and school café. Pupils make a positive contribution to the life of the school and the community.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive. They appreciate the regular communication between school and home. Parents feel that they are part of a caring community.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have designed a coherent and purposeful curriculum across a broad range of subjects. Staff are well trained to teach the curriculum that leaders have planned. Learning activities build on what pupils have learned before. Teaching, therapeutic and medical staff work together to share their expertise and understanding of each pupil's needs. This helps teachers adapt the curriculum and resources effectively to meet the

individual learning and development needs of each pupil. Pupils' individual learning plans are clear and detailed. In lessons, staff regularly check on pupils' understanding. Staff make sure that pupils learn and remember important knowledge through regular practice. Pupils participate positively in lessons. They achieve well across a broad range of subjects and experience. Leaders have identified what they intend to do to ensure that the curriculum is highly ambitious and enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well. Leaders' work to improve the curriculum for mathematics is already impacting positively on pupils' learning.

Pupils regularly practise and apply their learning in a range of contexts. Pupils understand how their learning helps prepare them for life beyond school. Pupils who manage the school tuck shop practise social interaction to help customers feel welcome when they visit the shop. They apply their knowledge of mathematics when stocktaking and managing the till. Older pupils gain valuable work experience by helping to run the school café or by taking part in a range of external placements in the local community.

The curriculum supports pupils well to develop their communication. Pupils practise reading in school. They read books that are well matched to their reading fluency and interests. Through the reading curriculum, pupils experience a broad range of literature. They explore the structure of stories and consider the purpose of different kinds of texts. Many pupils enjoy reading and being read to. However, pupils read with varying degrees of fluency. Some pupils are not making the progress that they should in their reading. This is because some pupils lack the phonics knowledge they need to read and spell unfamiliar words. Some pupils are over-reliant on adult support for their reading and their writing.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and life skills curriculum helps pupils to make informed choices about their adult lives. Pupils learn about different cultures. They understand the importance of tolerance and respect. These values are learned and lived as part of the culture of the school. Pupils actively participate in the democratic process when they elect their representatives for the school and eco-councils. Pupils take part in community and charity work. They are involved in community events through music, art and drama. Older pupils attend sessions at the local colleges. This helps them explore opportunities and plan their next steps in education and/or training.

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum for relationships and sex education (RSE). The RSE curriculum provides pupils and students with important knowledge to help them form healthy relationships and to keep themselves and others safe.

Governors' regular visits to the school help ensure that they are well informed. Staff feel supported in their roles. Staff value the opportunities to work closely with colleagues to provide the best support for pupils.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is at the forefront of everybody's mind. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training to help keep their knowledge up to date. They know how to recognise the signs of potential abuse. Staff are confident to report all safeguarding concerns. Records are diligently maintained. Pre-employment checks are carried out rigorously.

Staff understand their responsibility to speak up if something is not right. Leaders act promptly. They are tenacious in ensuring that vulnerable pupils and families can access the help they need. This includes other agencies and the school's family support team.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The reading curriculum does not include a systematic approach to teaching phonics for pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read text. Some pupils do not secure the knowledge they need to develop their accuracy, fluency and independence in reading and in spelling. Leaders must put a systematic phonics programme in place. This will enable pupils who are at the early stages of reading to gain the knowledge they need to segment, blend and decode text. This will support pupils to develop their independence in their reading and writing.
- Some areas of the curriculum are still under review and yet to match leaders' high ambitions. This means that while pupils perform well, they do not achieve all that they are capable of. Leaders, including governors, should ensure that their plans are implemented effectively. This will put in place a highly ambitious curriculum that enables all pupils to achieve exceptionally well across a wide range of subjects.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in November 2016.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View

when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## **Further information**

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

|                                                   |                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 109744                                                                     |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Luton                                                                      |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10210995                                                                   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Special                                                                    |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Community special                                                          |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 11 to 18                                                                   |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                           | Mixed                                                                      |
| <b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>   | Mixed                                                                      |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>        | 263                                                                        |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 50                                                                         |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                      | The governing body                                                         |
| <b>Chair of governing body</b>                    | Steven Gibbs                                                               |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Sandra Clarke                                                              |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | <a href="http://www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk">www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                | 2 and 3 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005           |

## Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the number of pupils on roll has increased from 171 to 263.
- The school caters for pupils with severe or profound learning difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. A number of pupils have complex mental health needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2021.
- The chair of governors took on their role in March 2019.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors met with the chair of governors and three members of the governing body. The lead inspector held an online meeting with the school's improvement adviser from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and communication, mathematics, art and design, PSHE education and life skills. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with members of the safeguarding team, including the designated safeguarding lead and the family welfare officer. They discussed the arrangements that are in place to support safeguarding. Inspectors looked at records of safeguarding concerns and how these are followed up. Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for pre-employment and recruitment checks, and scrutinised the single central record.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of behaviour, including bullying, and records of suspensions. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors met with pupils who have been elected to the school council and with pupils who represent the school on Luton Youth Council.
- Inspectors reviewed the information that is available on the school website, including school policies and information about the curriculum.
- Inspectors considered the 11 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 10 free-text comments. Inspectors took account of the 90 responses to the staff survey and the 30 responses to the pupil survey. Inspectors also spoke with pupils to gather their views of the school.

## Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Prue Rayner

Ofsted Inspector

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