

Woodlands Secondary School

Northwell Drive, Marsh Farm, Luton, Bedfordshire LU3 3SP

Inspection dates

2–3 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Exceptional leadership ensures that the school's aim to educate, motivate and celebrate the achievements of pupils in preparation for life beyond school is fully met.
- Outstanding teaching and high-quality care enable pupils with the most profound learning and health difficulties to make exceptional progress.
- The highly effective curriculum is enriched by a daily diet of activities and experiences that helps pupils to acquire skills for everyday living, and become increasingly independent.
- Teachers and support staff work as a team to plan learning suited to each pupil's needs. They know pupils very well. They are adept at engaging and motivating them to learn.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well through real-life tasks requiring pupils to interact with each other, with staff and other adults in the local community.
- High-quality specialist facilities and well-trained staff ensure that pupils with the most complex needs receive the therapies and support listed in their education, health and care plans.
- Behaviour in and out of lessons is managed exceptionally well.
- The school is a safe, caring and nurturing environment. Pupils told inspectors that they really enjoy coming to school and feel that staff and pupils 'work together as a family'.
- Wider assessments of how pupils achieve, and become less reliant on the support of adults, are providing a clearer picture of their overall progress. These procedures are not fully established.
- Staff foster excellent relations with parents and carers. Those who shared their views with inspectors praised the school and its staff.
- Almost all pupils move from Year 11 into the school's further education department. By the time they leave Year 13, all of them achieve basic qualifications in life and living skills.
- Strong partnerships ensure that pupils and their parents receive excellent guidance and support about the next stage of their child's training, care and support.
- Governors oversee the school's strategic development and manage its finances effectively. Some aspects of the school's improvement plan lack measurable targets to help them monitor how effectively improvements are being made.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen some of the targets in the school's improvement plan to help governors measure how effectively further improvements are made.
- Ensure that revised procedures to assess pupils' overall progress and personal development become firmly established throughout the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Senior leaders have secured significant improvement since the last inspection. Clear, coherent leadership from the headteacher has created a culture of improvement and high aspirations of pupils.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Leaders know what the school does well and what needs improving. Regular visits to classrooms provide leaders with a clear overview of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning.
- Leaders survey the views of parents and pupils to help to inform further improvement. Parental responses made during the inspection strongly agree that the school is well led and managed.
- Expectations are very high. Leaders insist on excellent standards for social behaviour among pupils and staff. The respect shown for one another and for staff is exceptionally good.
- Statements of special educational needs and education, health and care (EHC) plans are meticulously maintained. Specialist support staff, pupils and their parents all contribute to these reviews. Relevant targets are set to promote pupils' personal development.
- Leaders constantly seek further improvement. They use their expert subject knowledge and understanding of each pupil to personalise the curriculum for them. This helps pupils to grow in confidence, develop a range of personal skills and begin to manage their own lives. Prioritising their personal development and welfare, and managing their behaviour, provides the foundations for pupils' successful academic learning and progress.
- An exceptional curriculum places great emphasis on developing life skills. Developing communication, particularly speaking and listening skills, underpins much of the learning within and outside of lessons. Pupils are expected to listen carefully to instructions, to recognise key phrases and symbols, ask questions and make choices for themselves. Excellent relations with teachers and support staff enable pupils to 'speak up' for themselves and make decisions about their learning.
- The curriculum is enhanced further through weekly opportunities for pupils to learn in the local community by visiting shops and cafés, and the local library. Interacting with the public makes an excellent contribution to their confidence, communication skills and their understanding of how to travel safely and independently. Wider opportunities to participate in sport, music, art and gardening enrich pupils' lives.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and, within this, the promotion of fundamental British values is shaped by the school's caring and supportive ethos. Pupils are taught how to be tolerant and respectful towards each other. They operate democratically by sharing roles and responsibilities and by considering others' views when making decisions about activities to follow. A meeting with the school council confirmed that they feel they are listened to and have a key role to play in the school's development.
- Additional funding is used effectively to raise the achievement of all learners, including disadvantaged pupils. Tailoring learning to meet the specific needs of each pupil

ensures that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as others. The pupil premium is used appropriately to enhance the curriculum, including sensory interventions and therapies, and to employ a counsellor to foster links with families. None of the pupils known to be disadvantaged are in the most able group.

Governance of the school

- Governors share the headteacher's ambitions. They have provided her with the support and challenge needed to secure further improvement since the last inspection.
- Governors show an accurate understanding of the school's effectiveness. Minutes of meetings show that the views of staff and parents are considered when planning improvements, and that the needs of pupils remain central to all aspects of the school's work.
- Governors have engaged fully in initial discussions about the school becoming an academy.
- School finances are managed effectively, including the pupil premium and catch-up funding.
- Governors oversee arrangements to manage the performance of teachers and ensure that only those eligible for rewards move up the pay scale.
- An annual programme of visits planned throughout the year enables governors to find out for themselves how effectively aspects of the school are performing. However, the lack of targets in some aspects of the school's improvement plan prevents them from doing this fully.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All checks are carried out when appointing new staff or allowing volunteers to work with children. Inspectors' scrutiny of documents revealed that some of the information already held by the school had not been transferred over to the single central record. This was rectified before the end of the inspection.
- Policy and procedures to protect pupils are up to date and shared with parents on the school's website. Staff responsible for child protection maintain detailed notes of any incidents or issues relating to safeguarding. Links with outside agencies, particularly the local authority safeguarding team, are well established.
- Due to the nature of pupils' acute special educational needs, keeping pupils safe on-site and when they visit the local community is prioritised. The school site is safe and secure. Entry and exit is closely supervised. Risk assessments are prepared when off-site visits are made. All medicines are stored safely. Regular checks are made of the specialist facilities such as the hydrotherapy pool.
- Leaders involve parents fully in making arrangements to meet their child's personal requirements, so that their healthcare needs are fully met and they are kept safe.
- Procedures to protect pupils from radicalisation and extremism are firmly established. All staff training on safeguarding is up to date.
- Pupils' use of computers and social media is carefully monitored to ensure their safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Excellent teamwork and the commitment of all staff ensure that the vastly different, personal needs of each pupil are fully met. Regular staff training and professional development are prioritised. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their teaching. They feel that leaders have created a climate in which they are trusted to take risks and be innovative.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and medical staff show a thorough understanding of individual pupils' complex needs, and the actions needed to prepare them for learning. High-quality care and support, coupled with excellent management of their behaviour, enables them to engage fully with staff, and learn effectively alongside their peers.
- Pupils love the challenge of learning. They told inspectors that they particularly enjoy learning how to become more independent. They feel that daily opportunities to go out of school to shop for food, and cook and serve it to others, help to increase their confidence. These opportunities also help to promote their literacy, numeracy and social skills.
- Pupils benefit greatly from one-to-one support in small classes. They receive regular challenge, support and lots of praise. Staff correct any misconceptions they may have, and provide pupils with regular feedback about their work.
- The teaching and personal care provided for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are exceptional. Staff are highly skilled in engaging pupils through audio and visual stimulus, through touch and physical contact. Staff know the signs to look out for to see if pupils are progressing. They observe and record the same responses again and again, to confirm that pupils' learning is fully secure. High-quality 'learning journals' that illustrate through photographs and pupils' work how well they are progressing are shared with parents.
- Teaching resources are matched well to pupils' needs. For example, in a literacy lesson, pupils dressed up in costumes to represent characters in the story. During the story, the teacher checked their understanding by asking them to point to words, symbols and pictures that represented each of the characters. When pupils were asked to read aloud, other pupils were respectful and listened intently.
- Teachers plan active, interesting activities that capture pupils' interest. For example, in mathematics, older pupils used real coins to calculate the change needed from purchasing items with a five-pound note. Pictures of coins helped pupils to identify and sort different amounts, and shopping lists contained recognisable items to help to make learning realistic.
- Younger pupils used number fans to work out basic addition and show the teacher that they understood. They worked cooperatively, taking turns to throw dice, then adding numbers together and recording scores. A few of the more able pupils did this well and could easily cope with more challenging calculations.
- Senior leaders have recognised that previous assessment procedures have not provided a full picture of how well pupils are developing. Procedures have been recently strengthened. They now include 'pathways to independence' enabling staff to assess pupils' independent living skills and show how prepared they are for life as young adults.
- Progress reports are provided for parents each year. In addition, parents are kept informed about their child's progress, welfare and behaviour on a daily basis, through personal record books which pupils take home with them each day.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are happy, relaxed and confident in school. They demonstrate excellent attitudes and thrive in the warm, safe and nurturing environment provided for them. Pupils respect each other's different faiths and backgrounds, and do not see each other's colour or disability as reasons for prejudiced behaviour. They told inspectors that 'we work together as a family, and that at Woodlands, we are a team'.
- All staff are fully committed to the school's aim of preparing pupils for adulthood. Pupils follow curriculum pathways designed to enable some to gain employment, acquire independent living skills, and have ongoing healthcare and learning support.
- Pupils are given daily responsibilities to build their self-confidence and promote their independence. For example, pupils take turns to collect lunch orders from visitors. Older pupils shop together to buy groceries, and cook and serve food to others. They quickly learn basic cooking and cleaning skills. They learn how to travel independently by bus and train, and walk safely to the local library to exchange their reading books.
- Pupils are responsible for running the school tuckshop. They order new stock online, set up the shop, use the till and calculate the profits made. Older pupils run a successful enterprise project, packaging, labelling and marketing sweets to sell in local outlets.
- Good eating habits are reinforced through healthy choices at mealtimes, buying fresh food to be cooked by pupils, and by preparing fruit and vegetables grown in the school garden.
- The healthcare of pupils is a top priority. Staff show great sensitivity and respect when dealing with personal hygiene and medical issues, and always maintain pupils' dignity. Staff are trained by nurses, so they know what to do when pupils with medical conditions need help during the day.
- Strong partnerships exist with the carers of a small proportion of children who are looked after. The head of a local children's home praised the 'great working relations' shared with the school. The time and commitment spent by staff to get to know these pupils before they join the school was seen as a key factor in their successful inclusion and ongoing success. One looked after pupil with a long history of poor attendance and exclusion from his previous school now attends Woodlands regularly and is achieving well.
- Participation in a wide range of enrichment activities adds significantly to pupils' personal development and welfare, and enables them to gain national awards. For example, each year a small proportion of pupils achieve the Duke of Edinburgh's bronze or silver award, which is a truly remarkable achievement.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Behaviour is outstanding because pupils want to be in school and always respond positively to the nurturing environment provided for them.
- Pupils' enjoyment of school is reflected in their regular attendance.

- Behaviour is managed firmly but sensitively. For example, staff know when to reinforce expectations when behaviour slips below what is usually seen, and are expert in defusing situations involving extremely challenging behaviour.
- Pupils told inspectors that 'behaviour in lessons is really good'. Pupils move through corridors sensibly and calmly, and respect the high-quality displays on the walls. At breaktimes, pupils and adults mix well together in the sensory garden and play areas. Pupils play cooperatively together in friendship groups. They say they feel very safe and say that, if bullying occurs, they can turn to any adult for help.
- Incidents of poor behaviour, including bullying, are recorded systematically. Records show that very few incidents occurred last year and so far this year.
- 'The Oaks' unit caters for a small proportion of pupils that have severe learning difficulties and can exhibit high levels of challenging behaviour. These pupils receive exceptional one-to-one care and support, to manage their behaviour and keep them safe. Staff expertly combine short learning tasks with opportunities for personal choice, free play and therapeutic activities to help them to progress and engage in school life.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- From their very low starting points, pupils make exceptional progress over time. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- This is because the curriculum enables them to acquire basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), and develop essential life skills for independent living. Leaders ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to learn and practise these life skills.
- Leaders also ensure that those pupils capable of achieving national accreditation do so. In 2016, the majority of Year 11 pupils achieved an ASDAN personal progress award. A few also achieved unit awards in basic skills. Currently, a small proportion of pupils in key stages 4 and 5 are studying functional skills awards in literacy, numeracy and ICT.
- Funding to help key stage 3 pupils catch up is used effectively to improve their basic skills. It has provided new resources and training for staff to teach phonics more effectively, and purchase new equipment to aid learning in numeracy.
- The school's summative assessment information shows a confusing picture, as previous assessment methods have focused only on pupils' academic achievement. The information gained from the most recent assessments of pupils' achievement, and the development of life skills, provides a far more detailed picture of pupils' overall performance.
- Inspectors found that in lessons, pupils usually make consistently good progress due to the high-quality teaching, care and support they receive. As it grows in size, the proportion of most able pupils joining the school is rising. Some of these pupils have achieved the standards expected by the end of key stage 1. Leaders acknowledge that, in some subjects, teachers need to amend their planning to provide these pupils with more challenging work to do.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- The school's further education department is well led and has a very clear purpose. It enables students to extend their learning and gain further qualifications. Significantly, it provides a safe, familiar environment for them to continue to develop the personal and life skills needed for adulthood.
- Pupils and parents feel secure about this provision. Most students are not suited to full-time attendance at the local college. Almost all pupils in Year 11 progress into the school's further education department.
- This year, all students, including those with the most profound learning difficulties, achieved a level 1 or 2 life and living skills qualification by the end of Year 13. This represents a significant achievement, given their very low starting points. This award serves as foundation for further learning and for determining after-school care in the community.
- Teaching and learning are innovative and effective. Staff work collegiately to plan learning that develops the personal skills, knowledge and understanding students need for life after school. Expectations are high. For example, in a literacy lesson, students with severe learning difficulties, including autism, used laptops and tablets to prepare their written responses to a video clip. In life skills, they are required to follow cooking instructions, check health and safety procedures, cut and slice food, open tins, use a hot oven and serve plates and cutlery. Over time, these procedures become routine, enabling students to participate in everyday life at school and at home.
- Regular off-site visits help students to familiarise themselves with shops, cafés and transport, and keep themselves safe. They are taught how to interact with the public when purchasing goods or booking tickets. This makes an excellent contribution to the development of their communication skills, and relations with other adults.
- The curriculum is complemented by a range of after-school clubs, and events. An annual residential trip for students provides them with an excellent opportunity to live independently, away from home.
- Careers guidance and planning for the future are exceptional. Leaders host a transition fair in partnership with the local authority. This provides students and their parents with an insight into local providers who can support them in the next stage of their education, training and care. Further partnerships with a local supported employment agency enable a minority of more confident students to gain experience of the workplace. Last year, students attended placements in a local café, horse stables, the local football club and a food bank. Two groups of students also attended a bicycle maintenance course.

School details

Unique reference number	109744
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	10002606

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	171
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	47
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Luckett
Headteacher	Debbie Foolkes
Telephone number	01582 572 880
Website	www.woodlands.luton.sch.uk
Email address	woodlands.sec.admin@lbc.luton.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	17–18 January 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets the Department for Education's requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school caters for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have autistic spectrum disorders. A growing proportion of pupils have complex mental health issues. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs, or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly Asian or Black African, is above average.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited nine lessons accompanied by senior leaders, and carried out a learning walk with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, the school council, three members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority. A telephone conversation was held with another representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of eight free text responses sent to Ofsted by parents, and 54 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire from staff. Inspectors took the opportunity to meet informally with parents at the main entrance at the start of the second day of inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, assessment information, senior leaders' monitoring of teaching, and records of attendance and behaviour.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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