

Woodlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122962
Local Authority	City of Nottingham
Inspection number	327820
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Dobbins

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	54
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Thornton
Headteacher	Carol Barker (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons and held meetings with staff, groups of pupils, two parents, the school's improvement officer, the head of the local authority's additional needs team and the advisor to the school. The inspectors observed the school's work, looked at documents and policies and analysed 11 questionnaires from parents and carers.

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

- how well pupils are doing in their learning and how well they are prepared for the next stage of their education
- how safe pupils are
- how well pupils behave and attend
- how effective are leaders in driving improvement.

Information about the school

Woodlands is a school for pupils with a wide range of complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These include autistic spectrum and attention deficit disorders, difficulties with language and communication and moderate learning difficulties. The profile of pupils is changing as, over the last few years, more pupils are joining the school with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils attend from all regions of the City of Nottingham. A small number come from bordering local authorities. Almost all the pupils are of White British heritage and each has a statement of special educational needs. A higher proportion is eligible for free school meals than is typical. Most pupils are in Key Stages 3 and 4. There are no pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1.

The governing body resigned en bloc on 27 November 2009 due to an issue about the future of the school. The local authority has been instrumental in forming a 'new' governing body, which met for the first time on 7 December 2009. The acting headteacher is away on sick leave. The school is being led by the acting deputy headteacher.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Woodlands is a satisfactory school. Some aspects are improving. Pupils are making good progress in more lessons than at the time of the last inspection. They are behaving better and are better at applying themselves to their learning.

The severity of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities, sometimes compounded by gaps in their schooling, means that, overall, pupils attain at levels well below those expected for their age. But this is not the case for all pupils. A small minority is doing well for their age and some older pupils are expected to gain good GCSE grades in a few subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils are making satisfactory progress against their targets for learning. Against national data for equivalent pupils, last year's leavers did as well as expected in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology and better than expected in design and technology and physical education. Over each of the last three years, all leavers gained basic awards in English, mathematics, information and communication technology, physical education, design and technology and a youth award. A few achieved pass grades in a small number of GCSE subjects, including English. The transition arrangements between the school and the three local colleges that most pupils move to are good. Leavers enrol on a wide range of college courses which they see as relevant and interesting.

Teaching is satisfactory, although the procedures for improving teaching and learning are not working well because they are not rigorous enough. But there is evidence that teaching is becoming more effective. In a small number of lessons, assessment information is used well in planning to set targets for learning that match well with pupils' learning needs and capabilities. As a consequence, in these lessons pupils make good progress. However, in too many lessons assessment information is not used well enough in planning and new learning is not solidly based on prior attainment. Subject leaders do not help teachers sufficiently by identifying precise medium-term and long-term targets against which the progress pupils make can be accurately judged. Generally, pupils are learning what is right for them, but the curriculum is restricted to what can be offered, primarily, by the staff of the school. Consequently, pupils do not gain benefit from the additional learning experiences that would become available if the school were in partnership with other schools and/or agencies.

The school is a safe and, most of the time, a calm place. The good relationships staff have with pupils means that it is also a friendly place. Pupils who have had great difficulty in meeting the routines and expectations of their other schools settle well and many begin to enjoy their learning again. Most attend well because they see what the school offers as being of value to them. However, despite the best efforts of staff, a

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small but significant number of pupils do not attend well enough to gain full benefit from the school. Behaviour is satisfactory. Since the last inspection, leaders have managed a satisfactory improvement in the school. The current acting headteacher has led and managed the school well since she took up the leadership, and this bodes well for the future. But, the current temporary structure for leadership and governance is not secure enough to be successful in promoting short-term or long-term development. The satisfactory improvement since the last inspection shows the capacity for sustained improvement to be satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build a stable team of substantive leaders and governors.
- Raise standards by:
 - improving teaching and learning by applying a rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation
 - making more effective use of assessment information to plan lessons that are relevant to pupils, to set challenging medium term and long term targets and to judge the quality of pupils' progress
 - making subject leaders more accountable for progress in their subjects
 - extending and enriching pupils learning experiences through developing more partnerships with other schools and agencies
 - ensuring that all pupils attend regularly.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

In some lessons, pupils make good progress. This is because class sizes are small and teachers and their assistants are able to tend to the individual learning and additional needs of pupils quickly and effectively. Generally, in these lessons pupils behave well and make a good effort to do their best. They say they are doing well in their learning and those who have most recently joined the school say they are doing better than at their other schools. There is no evidence in school records, or gained over the time of the inspection, to suggest that any particular group of pupils does any better, or worse than any other in the progress they make toward their targets.

The good relationships pupils have with the staff help them be comfortable and enthusiastic as learners. They make satisfactory strides in their learning and also in gaining the skills of independent learning. For example, in a lesson in history pupils needed to find out what were the good characteristics of the Roman Army from resources made available by the teacher. The topic interested them, they knew exactly what was required of them, worked hard at gaining information and, by the end of the lesson, produced good quality written reports. In a minority of lessons, progress is

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limited because pupils do not apply themselves as diligently. Most often this is because planning does not take into account well enough what each pupil knows and can do. When this is the case, either they are required to complete tasks that are too hard for them, or tasks which do not challenge them sufficiently because they are too easy. As a result, pupils quickly lose attention and teachers and their assistants spend too much lesson time in returning them to their learning.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and this is confirmed by those parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire and who spoke to an inspector during the inspection. Behaviour is satisfactory, but pupils say that they are behaving better because the recently introduced procedures for improving behaviour are working well. These are liked by pupils and applied consistently by staff. They form a clear boundary for recognising what is acceptable behaviour and what is not, and for understanding 'right' and 'wrong'.

The work experience programme provides pupils with a satisfactory awareness of the local community, as do the links with each of the local colleges. Pupils gain good information on local topics from listening to visitors from the locality in the Friday morning coffee shop and through tending the gardens of old people's homes. They gain satisfactory knowledge of the wider world and different cultures through the curriculum and by deciding the charitable causes they should support. There is a good range of healthy food available at lunchtimes, but too few opportunities for pupils to be physically active outside of their timetabled lessons for physical education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The good progress pupils are making in some lessons results from planning that matches well with their learning and other needs. In these lessons, objectives for learning are ambitious, stated clearly and based on what each pupil knows and can do. Most often pupils work hard to do their best and in these lessons learning is fun. In other lessons, they make only satisfactory progress because imprecise planning slows progress.

The curriculum is slowly developing to meet the changing needs of pupils. It matches national requirements. Pupils in Key Stage 4 gain a good awareness of college life and of the world of work. The range of accredited awards is broadening and provides pupils with a satisfactory record of the progress they have made over their time at the school. Higher ability pupils are able to take an increasing number of GCSE subjects. History is the latest subject to be added to the school's portfolio. Lower ability pupils are able to show how literate and numerate they are over a number of relevant awards and, through a unit award scheme, are able to demonstrate their capabilities over topics that interest them. Cross-curricular links are satisfactory, but are not planned well enough to make a significant contribution to making the curriculum a cohesive learning package for pupils. The curriculum is somewhat broadened by the programme of themed days, the one after-school club and the annual residential visit.

The systems to ensure the well-being and welfare of pupils meet all requirements. Pupils say the school is a better place for learning since the introduction of the new behaviour programme because they value the time they gain, through their good behaviour and effort, to spend on activities they choose. The clear targets in individual education plans work well. They provide good guidance on what pupils need to do to reach the next level of learning in literacy and numeracy, and what is required of them to improve their behaviour and develop their personal and social skills. Most pupils leave school to attend the local college of their choice. When they leave, they do so confident that they have chosen the training programme that fits best with their capabilities and interests.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3

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The effectiveness of care, guidance and support

3

How effective are leadership and management?

Since the last inspection, senior leaders have consolidated the gains made during the time the school was in special measures. Recent initiatives by the local authority have helped developments, for example the satisfactory arrangements for safeguarding and for improving pupils' behaviour and, in part, these have been successful because of the energetic and committed support of the current acting headteacher. She has a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and knows the need for teaching and learning to be checked with more rigour. She realises that assessment information is not moderated sufficiently thoroughly to enable it to be used with more effect to improve lesson planning and to judge how well pupils are doing against others nationally. She is aware that opportunities for extending and enriching the curriculum through partnership arrangements are not being fully utilised and that a significant minority of pupils will have to attend more regularly if they are going to gain benefit from the school. But, most importantly, she has the clear recognition that the active involvement of an efficient and effective governing body is required in helping move the school forward.

The interim governing body has had too little time to date to get to know the school, to set up procedures for shaping the direction of the school or to challenge and support leaders. The temporary nature of leadership and governance means that some plans for development are functionally on hold, including those to engage with a greater number of community groups and to establish clearer links with parents and carers in helping them support their children's learning and personal and social development at home. Community cohesion is satisfactory. The actions leaders have taken have resulted in pupils knowing the religious, ethnic and socio-economic characteristics of the local area, but they are less knowledgeable of issues in the wider national and international communities. The generous pupil - staff ratio and the good relationships that pupils have with all staff means that their needs are recognised quickly, and dealt with effectively, so that all pupils gain equivalent benefit from what the school offers, irrespective of the cause or severity of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Although there has been a satisfactory improvement over the last few years, all associated with the school know that significant improvement is unlikely to be achieved without a period of stable and effective leadership from a team of substantive leaders ably supported by an effective board of governors.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement

3

Taking into account:

The leadership and management of teaching and learning

3

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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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are supportive of the school. They are especially pleased with the way the school is meeting the particular needs of their children, the good progress their children are making because they see teaching as good, and the good way that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with. The two parents who spoke with an inspector were very pleased with the high level of care and support their children received from staff and the high quality of advice that they were able to gain on matters to do with their children. The detailed analysis of the progress pupils are making and direct observations of lessons and the working of the school led inspectors to judge the school less positively than do the parents who responded to the questionnaire or talked to an inspector.

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 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 11 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 54 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	6	55	3	27	2	18	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	8	73	2	18	1	9	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	73	3	27	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	82	2	18	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	9	82	2	18	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	64	4	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	70	3	30	0	0	0	0
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)	6	55	4	36	1	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	64	4	36	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	73	2	18	0	0	1	9
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	55	5	45	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	7	64	3	27	1	9	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	8	73	2	18	0	0	1	9

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. 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 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	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

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

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 pupil's 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.



11 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Woodlands School, Aspley, NG8 3EZ

It was lovely for me and my colleague to meet and talk with you when we visited your school. Thank you for making us so welcome. We found that the school provides you with a satisfactory education, which means that it does some things well but some things need to be improved. We especially liked:

- the good relationships you have with all the staff
- that you feel safe and comfortable at school
- the good attitudes to learning you show in many lessons, and the easy way you make friends with each other.

There are a few things I have asked the school to improve. I would like your leaders and governors to be able to work more effectively with each other in helping develop the school. I would like them to:

- look more closely and more often at how well you are being taught and to have better procedures for judging how good the progress you make is
- make sure that your teachers are using their knowledge of what you know and can do in planning lessons so that you do not find the work too hard or too easy
- form partnership arrangements with other schools and/or agencies to add breadth to what you are learning
- make sure the leaders of each of the different subjects have better plans for your learning.

You can do your bit to help by continuing to work hard in your lessons, by always trying to do your best and by making sure that you attend regularly.

Thank you again for being so welcoming and I will always have pleasant memories of my time with you.

Yours sincerely

Alan Dobbins

Lead Inspector

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