

Woodlands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119871
Local Authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	358637
Inspection dates	14–15 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Graham Fletcher
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Henderson
Date of previous school inspection	12 September 2007
School address	Whitegate Drive Blackpool Lancashire FY3 9HF
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, an assembly and an off-site resource base. Ten teachers were observed and discussions held with a member of the governing body, five parents and carers, students, senior staff and teachers. Inspectors looked at the school's work, scrutinised policies, improvement plans and examined 23 questionnaires completed by parents and carers.

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

- It judged how well assessments are used to help students make the best possible progress.
- It considered the impact of the curriculum on promoting students' future economic well-being and developing their basic skills.
- It looked at the effectiveness of the school in providing care, guidance and support for students.
- It investigated the capacity of the new leaders and managers to improve the school.

Information about the school

Woodlands educates students with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many students experience other barriers to learning such as complex communication needs and associated behaviours. Around 22% have autistic spectrum conditions. All have a statement of special educational needs. Students enter the school at any time in their school career and most continue until they are 19 years old. Since the last inspection Woodlands has become an extended school offering after-school and holiday clubs. It is co-located with a new children's centre that provides extended services, and has made links with colleges. Woodlands has the regionally representative cohort of students from minority ethnic groups of around 10%. Eight students are looked after by the local authority and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is much higher than the national average. The catchment area for Woodlands includes all of the Borough of Blackpool and parts of Lancashire. Woodlands has maintained Healthy Schools Status since 2007.

At the time of the inspection the newly appointed headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and primary team leader had been in post for just over one week. Another member of the senior team was away from school on a visit to Germany with a group of students from the sixth form.

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 provides good education and outstanding care for its students. It is held in high esteem nationally, locally and by the local authority. Parents and carers have exceptionally positive relationships with the school and a typical comment offered by one was, 'We could not ask more from the school team.' Students attend very willingly and feel very safe here. Their behaviour is exemplary, making it possible for them to participate in a wide range of activities both on and off site. They greatly improve their social skills. Students in the sixth form take part in work and learning away from the school and understand to the best of their abilities what is expected of them. These experiences contribute to remarkable outcomes in further education. Off-site activities such as attending the Woodlands resource base at a local primary school add to students' knowledge of other communities and they experience people in different environments.

Students learn well and make good progress overall; some make exceptional progress. Consequently, students improve their communication skills and are well prepared for the future and for moving on to the next stages of their lives. Older students gain qualifications and some learn to cope in the workplace with a few securing paid employment as a result. Teaching is good and improving under the highly effective leadership team. However, assessments are not always used to best effect by teachers and, consequently, students' learning targets in lessons are not always sufficiently challenging. Nevertheless, the new management team has carefully analysed the systems of the school and instigated a more rigorous collection and scrutiny of assessment data. This is providing insight to the performance of different groups and is designed to ensure that all are included and no groups are disadvantaged in any way. Self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows its strengths and areas for improvement well. In these ways, the school demonstrates good capacity for improvement and is changing students' education for the better.

Care, guidance and support for students is the great strength of the school and the highly effective partnerships and arrangements with other services provide opportunities for students to enhance their learning and leisure activities. Managers are rigorous in ensuring that all statutory obligations are met but in classrooms the poor acoustics sometimes prevent autistic students from engaging fully in learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By July 2012 improve progress for all groups of students throughout the school by developing the use of assessments that help teachers set more-accurate learning

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targets for students in lessons.

- Assist the learning for students with complex sensory needs by improving the acoustic environment of classrooms.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students participate well in lessons, are keen to learn and their achievements are good. They behave excellently. Most make good gains in literacy and numeracy and, consequently, become better communicators, thus gaining the essential skills for moving on to the next stages of their lives. For some groups of students over longer periods of time progress is very much higher than expected for similar schools. It is inappropriate to compare their attainment with national expectations because of the severity of their special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the upper school, including the sixth form, all students succeed in gaining external accreditations. Last year nobody left without a place in further education training or employment and this is a remarkable achievement for a school of this nature.

Students feel very safe in school. This is confirmed through the responses provided by parents and carers and indicated by the students themselves. At over 95% attendance is remarkable for a school of this nature and absences are almost always related to medical matters. Students learn about healthy eating in their lessons and make sensible choices about their lunches. They take part in regular exercise through the curriculum and play out of doors using the attractive playground facilities to good effect. This helps them reduce their stress levels so that they can re-engage with learning on returning to the classroom.

Students contribute well to the life of the school. For example, they volunteer to help during assembly and offer assistance to each other during social gatherings such as lunchtimes. They get on very well together and instances of bullying and racism are unknown in the school. Students carry these attributes successfully into activities beyond school and thus gain high-quality social, moral and spiritual experiences. The school council enthusiastically represents students' views and contributes to decisions such as planning the furniture for playground areas. The school raises money for charity through events which provide additional opportunities to engage with other communities. Many students undertake trips that support their learning and development. Some, despite their difficulties, go on residential visits in this country and abroad. These experiences bring opportunities for interaction with others from different cultures and chances to practise independence skills in unfamiliar surroundings.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good with examples of outstanding practice. In some outstanding lessons teachers plan very thoroughly with detailed lesson targets for individual students. In these lessons students make extremely good progress and are carefully supported by teaching assistants working with skill and care. Here, teachers understand the special educational needs and/or disabilities of individual students and they use the latest assessment information effectively. These teachers also demonstrate awareness of the groups of students in their classes and successfully vary work to the different needs and abilities.

Students follow an individualised curriculum until the end of Key Stage 3. This provides good opportunities for all. The 14 to 19 curriculum has served students well, but the leadership team is currently planning different pathways and accredited courses that could benefit older students. Many nurturing activities occur throughout the day and these reinforce aspects of personal, social and health education, and encourage students to take responsibility for their behaviour. Older students gain skills and experience from their work experiences. Opportunities have been provided through working with partners for students to meet children and young people from other schools. The extended school provides after-school clubs each week and activities during holidays. Partnerships with local schools enable students to enhance their learning in different environments. Links with colleges encourage older students to sample different courses and gain qualifications.

Excellent relationships encourage students to trust the adults. Staff work closely with each other and with other professionals to ensure that students spend as much time as

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possible in school. Staff provide outstanding care and guidance. For example, they greet students individually, check carefully that they are ready to start the day and remain alert to individual medical and other needs. These trusting relationships are instrumental in encouraging students to come to school and feel positive about their education. Students and their families receive excellent guidance at times of transition and when students move on to the next stages of their lives.

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
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers, building on the legacy of previous highly effective leadership and management, are driving the school's improvement very successfully. They are bringing even greater rigour to the ways in which teachers use assessments more frequently and more effectively. Additionally, they have planned new and improved curricular pathways for older students. New systems have been introduced to appraise the work of the school with great skill to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to progress and that none are discriminated against. The effective governing body has consistently supported and steered the school through a period of uncertainty and change, and is determined to continue to improve its own effectiveness. Members of the governing body have great ambition for the school and regularly visit. Safeguarding practices have been reviewed in great detail by the headteacher and are outstanding because policies and procedures are exemplary. Designated safeguarding staff and governors have completed the statutory training to the required levels and beyond, and all aspects of safeguarding are undertaken with great skill and awareness. Woodlands places high levels of importance on its contributions to the community. The partnerships and collaborations that have emerged recently greatly benefit students from all of the educational establishments involved. The school works very closely with the co-located children's centre. Woodlands maintains outstanding action planning to promote community cohesion and students are encouraged, as well as they are able, to maintain the best possible relations with others from different backgrounds.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2

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

Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Through their responses children indicate that they feel safe and confident in this well-structured environment. Staff work effectively as a team to ensure that children settle into the daily routines and learn to share experiences with others. For example, the unit has been successful in integrating some very young children with complex barriers to learning so that they attend regularly and enjoy the activities provided. Children develop communication skills within their capabilities so that they become more tolerant of others and cooperative with adults.

Thorough planning ensures good coverage of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. The leader employs appropriate assessment strategies that are effective in helping staff to gauge progress and plan activities. The unit is well resourced and spacious enough to ensure that the individual needs of children can be met. However, one of the rooms used by the Early Years Foundation Stage children is less suitable because of fewer resources and high levels of echo. The school has begun to plan alternative provision for this group to ensure improved suitability. The team is well organised and well directed but occasionally the adults intervene too early with children and this reduces the effectiveness of the activities.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

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Sixth form

At the time of the inspection the leader of the sixth form was accompanying a group of students on an exchange visit to Germany. An accompanying teacher reported that, despite their special educational needs and/or disabilities, medical needs and personal care requirements, all were demonstrating high levels of independence and very high levels of social skills with their hosts. For most students throughout their time in the sixth form, their achievements from their very low starting points are remarkable. Their outstanding personal and social developments provide them with the confidence to undertake international visits and local expeditions. Furthermore, they all gain accreditations and undertake off-site courses and work experiences. They learn to make decisions and to think for themselves. In school there is a constant focus on developing skills for living independently and keeping themselves safe in all aspects of their lives. Thus, provision for students is outstanding.

Personalised learning programmes allow students to progress at their own pace. The curriculum is individually designed with enrichments tailored to their interests. Excellent partnership arrangements with other institutions and agencies provide a wide range of opportunities to sample and undertake vocational and other courses. As a result, all move to placements beyond school and a few obtain part-time work. Care, guidance and support for all, including those whose circumstances make them the most vulnerable, is of a very high standard. The staff share a common sense of purpose and their very good teamwork is trusted implicitly by students because of outstanding leadership and management. Parents and carers are kept very well informed about their children's progress and are consulted on a regular basis to ensure that support is always appropriate. Health and safety of students undertaking the great range of activities is the priority, for example through the extremely good use of risk assessments. Consequently, they feel secure and well cared for.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were returned from 23 parents and carers. Five parents spoke to the lead inspector and three more telephoned directly to the offices of the inspection contractor in order that their views could be registered in time. This is an expected rate of response for a school of this nature.

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Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the school, particularly in matters relating to the care, guidance and support of their children and the inspectors fully agree with this. A few parents and carers wrote comments that illustrated their support for the school more generally. A typical response was: 'I cannot praise Woodlands School enough. My son is continuing to make excellent progress in all areas of development. He is a happy contented boy.' Inspectors believe that these positive responses illustrate the excellent relationships between the school and parents and carers.

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 23 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 84 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	18	78	5	22	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	17	74	6	26	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	16	70	7	30	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	15	65	8	35	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	74	6	26	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	70	7	30	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	61	9	39	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)	13	57	9	39	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	65	8	35	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	61	8	35	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	70	7	30	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	17	74	6	26	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	18	78	5	22	0	0	0	0

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



16 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Woodlands School, Blackpool, FY3 9HF

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you on the playground, at lunch and in your classes. I particularly enjoyed your singing during assembly.

Woodlands is a good school and the adults look after you very well indeed. We believe that you feel very safe and secure at school and you enjoy the excellent relationships that you have with each other and with the adults. Your attendance is very high and we think that your behaviour is excellent. Your parents and carers work very cooperatively with the school to try to make Woodlands a good place for you to learn and work together. The school is developing new and exciting opportunities for you to meet with each other after school and with students from other schools and colleges.

The leaders and managers of your school are working very hard to try to make your education even better than it is. However, the inspectors feel that some improvements could still be made. For example, we would like the teachers to use assessment information better and more regularly. This would help you to make even greater progress in your lessons. We also feel that some of the classrooms could be made to be less noisy because we know that the high levels of sound and the echoing distract you from your work.

We wish you all the best for the future and once again thank you for your help and interest in the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Terry McKenzie

Lead Inspector

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