

Inspection of an outstanding school: Woodfield School

Malmes Croft, Leverstock Green, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP3 8RL

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy attending Woodfield. They develop their communication skills well. This means that all pupils have ways of telling adults how they are feeling. Leaders are ambitious for pupils' achievement. However, the programme of topics does not clearly challenge different ages and abilities to achieve well.

Many pupils become sociable with their peers. They enjoy playtime and learning together. The resources that pupils use to help them learn are well matched to support those who have sensory needs.

As pupils get older, they are encouraged to be more independent. Pupils become increasingly adept at self-care, for example in moving from chair to chair or in feeding themselves. Older pupils become confident in moving between activities without the need for supervision. They develop life skills, such as preparing food and working in the on-site coffee shop.

Pupils have warm relationships with the adults in the school. Adults use consistent language and strategies to help those pupils who struggle with their behaviour to succeed. Bullying is rare.

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

Woodfield provides education for pupils with a wide range of complex needs. The curriculum is based around a developmental pathway. This focuses on increasing pupils' knowledge and skills, such as communication and physical development, in small, gradual steps. Staff know the pupils well. They ensure that activities in class are well matched to everyone's next steps. This means that pupils make good progress. However, the detail of the themes of the curriculum, for example, 'people who help us' or 'water', is not as well

planned. The themes are not yet planned for future years. It is not clear enough to new teachers and/or parents how what pupils learn in each half term will be different for pupils of different ages and at different stages of their learning.

Pupils enjoy the stories staff read to them. Staff use props and toys to bring the stories to life, for example, spraying water to make it 'rain'. Leaders have ensured that each class has a mix of books that meet pupils' sensory needs, such as tactile parts and sound buttons. Those pupils who are learning to read have appropriate books and practise phonics effectively with their teachers.

The school has had substantial staffing challenges in the last few years, following rapid growth in pupil numbers and difficulty recruiting to vacant posts. Many staff are highly skilled. For example, they use objects and symbols to help pupils anticipate what is coming next. Not all staff have had the opportunities to develop these skills. As a result, some are not as effective as others in meeting pupils' needs.

Pupils behave well. They are highly tolerant of each other's differences. Many work well together, supporting those who find things harder. Leaders have introduced a much wider set of resources into pupils' learning to encourage pupils to consider different cultures and ways of living. For example, having learned about Eid, pupils tasted roti. They had coloured scarves as visual and touch cues and made their own henna designs. Communication symbols and toys match the pupils' own cultural and physical identities.

Students in the sixth form benefit from a more adult setting away from the younger pupils. Those who can are encouraged to be independent, organising themselves and getting themselves to different activities. The school provides appropriate work placements for students and works closely with families to plan next destinations for learning, training or employment.

The governing body is small but expanding. Governors provide appropriate challenge to the school leadership team. They are building up their understanding of the quality of the curriculum and its implementation.

The relationship between parents and school leaders is not as positive as it should be. Parents appreciate the key-worker system and the daily contact about how their child is doing. However, a significant number of parents are unhappy with the overall provision the school offers.

Most staff feel well supported by leaders. Some systems in place are workload heavy. Leaders have just introduced a new way of tracking pupil progress and achievement, but it is very new so has not had an impact on workload yet.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff have appropriate training that is specifically focused on safeguarding pupils with complex needs. Staff are knowledgeable about how to spot if

pupils who struggle to communicate may be at risk. Record-keeping is thorough. Any concerns about pupils are dealt with appropriately.

Leaders work closely with a wide range of external agencies, including children's services, to keep pupils safe.

Pupils learn at an appropriate level about issues such as consent. Leaders ensure that all pupils are taught to be able to communicate likes and dislikes.

All appropriate pre-employment checks are made on members of staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The context in which the curriculum is taught is not as well planned out as the small steps focused on pupils' communication and physical development. Themes beyond this academic year have not yet been identified. Teachers decide how each theme, for example 'water', will be used in their class. As a result, it is not clear enough for newer teachers and/or parents how each topic will provide different experiences for pupils of different ages and abilities. Leaders need to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are clearly planned to enable all pupils to achieve their potential.
- Some staff are not as well trained in teaching communication skills and/or responding to pupils' sensory needs as others because they are recent starters or temporary staff. Consequently, they are not as effective in supporting pupils to achieve well. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have the training and support they need to be effective in their roles.
- The relationship between school leaders and a significant number of parents is not positive. This means that the school and families are not working together as effectively as they need to. Leaders have not made clear what they want pupils to learn over the course of the year. Leaders and governors need to improve the relationship between families and school, so that parents are supportive of the school's work and provision.

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 2017.

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

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| Unique reference number | 117682 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10268625 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 126 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 16 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Carol Kelsey |
| Headteacher | Kate Marrs-Gant |
| Website | www.woodfield.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 28 and 29 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- This school is for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and multi-sensory impairments. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 other members of the leadership team. They met with members of staff. They also spoke with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and language, physical development, and personal and social education. For each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record and a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding files. Inspectors spoke to leaders, including the designated safeguarding leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the 57 responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also considered the 27 responses to the Ofsted survey for school staff.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Fowler

Ofsted Inspector

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