

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Woodlands

Broom Road, Ferryhill DL17 8AN

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 April 2025

Outcome

The Woodlands has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's values of growth, respect, opportunity, positivity, and well-being are high priorities at this nurturing school. There is a purposeful and calm atmosphere. Pupils are valued and warmly welcomed by caring staff. Adults know pupils well. They support and encourage pupils to do their best. Pupils enjoy learning in a safe and inclusive environment. They appreciate that staff listen to them and understand their needs.

Pupils have often experienced disruption to their education in the past. The school makes sure that staff understand pupils' additional and individual learning needs. Staff use this information to design programmes that reignite pupils' interest in learning.

There are high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. The curriculum is broad and ambitious. It supports pupils to build their knowledge and skills according to their needs. Pupils are well prepared to move back to mainstream education or to special school provision.

Pupils learn to behave well. Skilled staff help pupils to develop ways to manage their emotions and behaviour. Pupils know that they can talk to adults they trust about their worries. The school provides personalised and effective pastoral support for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs.

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

The school has an ambitious curriculum that has the structure and flexibility to meet pupils' needs. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' English and mathematics skills. The school knows its pupils very well. Staff quickly gain a thorough understanding of pupils' needs. As a result, most pupils achieve well. Pupils follow examination pathways

and gain recognised qualifications. Typically, they are successful in re-joining their mainstream schools. However, there are some limitations in the resources that pupils at the school can access. This means that a few pupils with education, health and care plans (EHC plans) do not receive some aspects of their learning programmes. The school is working with partners to look for ways to overcome these difficulties.

The school has strengthened its approach to develop pupils' reading. The school's reading curriculum is ambitious. The teaching of phonics is a strength. Suitable resources support older pupils in learning to read. They engage well with reading sessions. Pupils demonstrate considerable reading improvements during their time in the school.

Behaviour is often exemplary. Positive relationships between staff and pupils are at the heart of this. Pupils learn to recognise and express their emotions, developing increasing self-awareness and self-regulation. Consistent routines help pupils know what to expect, which they find comforting and reassuring. The staff 'meet and greet' at the beginning of the day helps each pupil get off to a positive, calm start.

The school has strong procedures to promote pupils' attendance and to follow up absences. It works effectively with alternative providers, parents and carers and external professionals to explore any barriers to coming to school. During their time at the school, pupils' attendance improves.

There is a broad enrichment programme that helps pupils develop personal and social skills. It prepares them well for future success. For example, pupils inspired by the mixed martial arts coaching in school have gone on to be successful in national competitions. Pupils meet local people who have lived through significant traumatic experiences. These activities provide pupils with the opportunity to reflect on the choices that they and others make. Pupils develop valuable real-world perspectives.

Members of the management committee bring considerable expertise to their roles. They are hugely invested in the school and ambitious for every pupil here. Governors share leaders' high aspirations, supporting and challenging the school in equal measure. They have overseen the successful expansion of the provision and further outreach work.

The school's high-quality professional training enables staff to continually improve their practice. The school has a significant wider reach through its training and work with many schools in the area. Local headteachers commend the work of the school in supporting pupils to re-engage with education. They describe the transformative impact of its work on their pupils. The school is making a positive difference to the lives of pupils and their families.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not have the resources to deliver some of the provisions listed in the EHC plans for some of the pupils in the primary provision. This means that some pupils do not achieve as well as they should. The school should ensure that all pupils with EHC plans have the provision they need to succeed as well as they can.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in June 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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	113992
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10370355
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	496
Appropriate authority	The Management Board
Chair of management board	Sally Green
Executive Headteacher	Lesley Candler
Website	www.thewoodlands.durham.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school operates over seven sites based in Ferryhill, Sacriston, Lanchester and Leadgate.
- The school caters for pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream schools, those pupils who are identified as close to permanent exclusion and those who cannot attend school because of health needs. Pupils join the school throughout the academic year.
- Some pupils are dual registered with other schools.
- The school uses twenty-three unregistered alternative education providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, deputy headteachers, some base leaders, the school finance manager, the safeguarding leader and manager.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the management board.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning, listened to some pupils reading to a familiar adult and looked at samples of pupils' work and considered a range of documentation.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interest first.
- The lead inspector spoke with representatives of the local authority who commission places from the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and Ofsted's surveys for pupils and staff.

Inspection team

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