

Woolgrove School, Special Needs Academy

Pryor Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 2PT

Inspection dates

21–22 February 2017

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Good teaching and excellent care for pupils enable them to make good progress and thoroughly enjoy school life.
- Clear, coherent leadership from the headteacher has raised expectations of staff and added momentum to the school's drive for further improvement.
- Senior leaders work effectively as a team to manage the school and lead improvement.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Staff have high expectations of pupils. They teach them how to conduct themselves and look after each other.
- Pupils thrive in the safe, stimulating environment provided for them. Relationships between pupils, and with staff, are exceptionally strong.
- From their very low starting points, all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make good progress.
- Improved assessment and marking procedures enable staff to target support towards those in need of additional help.
- Assessment information is not used consistently to inform the next steps needed to consolidate pupils' learning.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop their writing in English lessons or in other subjects.
- A broad curriculum is enriched by specialist teaching in outdoor learning, physical education, music and art.
- Pupils' engagement in a range of enrichment activities, the school council, fundraising and off-site visits adds significantly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Children in the early years get off to a good start. High-quality care, good provision and leadership enable them to flourish.
- Some middle-leader roles are underdeveloped.
- Staff liaise well with parents to ensure pupils' safety and well-being, and to keep them informed of the school's work.
- Governors share the headteacher's ambition for the school. Additional training for them has begun to sharpen their understanding of what the school does well, and what it needs to do to improve further.
- All safeguarding requirements are met.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that the information gained from regular assessments and teachers' feedback is used consistently to inform accurately the next steps needed to consolidate pupils' learning
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to develop their letter formation, handwriting and extended writing across all subjects.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - developing the roles of subject and middle leaders so they make a full contribution to school improvement
 - evaluating the full impact of training provided for governors and ensuring that they play a wider role in monitoring and improving the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- In a short space of time, the headteacher has made a telling difference to the way the school is run. She has sharpened monitoring procedures and clarified what she expects from staff. She has quickly won the confidence of staff and parents.
- Senior leaders share her vision for the school. They work collaboratively to keep pupils safe, monitor their progress and well-being, and develop provision. They demonstrate a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have the capacity to make further improvements.
- Recent changes in the leadership of science and mathematics mean that some subject leadership is new and therefore underdeveloped. Training is under way to develop these roles further.
- School leaders, including governors, are fully committed to developing teaching and learning. All staff have regular opportunities to attend training to increase their effectiveness.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the school has been updated. This information is used effectively to identify suitable priorities in the school improvement plan.
- Leaders' monitoring of teaching is systematic. Formal lesson observations and learning walks identify the strengths and weaknesses of teachers, and inform their further training needs. Pupils' work is also scrutinised. This information is not used well enough to reveal the full impact of teaching on pupils' learning.
- Leaders make effective use of a range of assessment information to monitor pupils' academic progress and their personal development. They liaise with other local schools and the local authority to validate the rigour and accuracy of their assessments.
- Assessment procedures generate a wealth of statistical information to show the progress pupils are making. Leaders have much less evaluative information to show patterns and trends, or to explain some of the anomalies in the information.
- The curriculum is tailored to meet the different needs of pupils. Learning in core subjects, computing, personal, social and health education, including citizenship, and topic work is enriched by participation in sports and arts clubs, off-site swimming and visits to the local community. This adds significantly to pupils' behaviour, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and their wider understanding of how others live in modern Britain.
- The physical education and sport premium is used effectively. It adds significantly to pupils' enjoyment of school. Funding is also used wisely to provide additional sports clubs, and to enable pupils to participate in events with other schools organised by the local sports partnership.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to enrich pupils' experiences, manage their behaviour and provide additional help for them in lessons. Leaders have identified the barriers faced by disadvantaged pupils. The funding of additional therapies and additional support staff is helping these pupils to make similar progress to others.

- Parents who shared their views with inspectors were overwhelmingly supportive. Their satisfaction with the school is summed up by one parent who said, 'I am happy that I sent my child to this school as I have seen tremendous progress in his ability since he started. It is obvious that he is well taught and very happy at school, so much so that he wants to go even during school breaks. In all, Woolgrove perfectly meets the needs of my child and helps him to reach and exceed his potential.'

Governance

- Experienced governors, who also represent the academy trust, have overseen the strategic development of the school as it has broadened its provision to meet a wider range of needs and grown in size since the last inspection.
- Governors' swift action to appoint a new leader has enabled the school to maintain its effectiveness and has added significant leadership capacity to make further improvements.
- Careful management of the school's finances has led to the refurbishment and extension of the school premises. Governors can account for the additional funding the school receives, and the impact it has on pupils' progress and participation.
- They ensure that only those teachers deserving pay increases get them.
- Governors meet their statutory duties. They make regular checks of procedures to safeguard pupils. Checks of the school's website to make sure that all documents are up to date and available to parents are less frequent.
- Governors also oversee an outreach support service that operates from the school site. This service is valued highly by local schools.
- Additional training has identified what governors do well, and what they need to do to increase their effectiveness. A detailed plan is in place to enable them to do this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All required checks are carried out when recruiting new staff.
- Staff training in safeguarding is up to date.
- Suitable procedures are in place to manage access into school buildings.
- Procedures to manage pupils' safety as they arrive at and depart from school have been strengthened and are carried out systematically.
- A team of designated leaders for child protection ensure that safeguarding is understood by staff and incidents are recorded in detail and followed up rigorously. Pupils' needs and backgrounds are known well. A family support worker ensures that issues arising with vulnerable pupils are followed up and parents are kept informed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Leaders evaluate the quality of teaching to be good. Inspection findings confirm this. Changes in staffing, including the appointment of recently qualified teachers have helped to strengthen the overall quality of teaching.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work collaboratively and effectively. Routines are well established. Pupils' needs are known well.
- Behaviour is managed exceptionally well. Staff set high expectations of pupils. They deal promptly and effectively with off-task behaviour. This provides pupils with a calm, purposeful environment in which to learn.
- Staff are adept at developing pupils' communication skills, particularly those pupils whose speech and language are underdeveloped. They gain pupils' confidence quickly by forging good relations with them, use a range of techniques and adapt resources to enable pupils to engage fully in learning.
- Staff take every opportunity to reinforce expectations and engage pupils in meaningful, enjoyable activities. For example, during changeover time in group work, pupils are reminded to move quickly, take care and work collaboratively. When moving between classrooms, pupils are taught how to conduct themselves, look after others and speak politely.
- In the majority of lessons seen by inspectors, teachers used their good subject knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs to plan tasks that stimulate pupils' interest and make learning fun. They used interactive whiteboards and computers well to engage pupils. Not all teachers ensure that the most able pupils are given suitably challenging work.
- Teachers provide a range of hands-on resources to promote pupils' mathematical understanding, including board games and computer software. Their questioning engages all pupils in discussion. Good answers are rewarded by praise and the awarding of stars.
- Teachers mark pupils' work systematically, following the school's marking policy, and encourage them to comment on their learning. Staff identify the next steps to improve. However, books show that unfinished work is not always revisited quickly enough to enable pupils to do this. Pupils are unable to consolidate their learning because new tasks do not relate directly to the work they have recently completed.
- Assessment in lessons is very good. Dedicated support from teaching assistants provides pupils with regular and sustained guidance about how to complete tasks, lay out their work and make improvements. This, and information gained from marking, provides a good overview of how well pupils are progressing, and helps to inform future planning.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders provide pupils with a safe, stimulating environment. This enables them to grow in confidence, build self-esteem and thoroughly enjoy school life.
- Pupils respect and care for one another. They are helped to build friendships, to listen carefully to one another without interrupting, and to work and play safely together. Pupils told inspectors that 'school is a special place for special children, where everyone is nice, we have lots of friends and we have fun.'
- Staff take every opportunity to teach pupils about the importance of lining up, waiting for their turn, using cutlery at lunchtimes and tidying up after them. Pupils wait for others to finish their meal before leaving the table. They are encouraged to eat healthily, and recognise what foods are good for them.
- They are tolerant of each other and recognise the different backgrounds they come from. Visits to a local mosque, temple and church help to increase their understanding of others' beliefs. Lessons in preparing food help them to understand how people from other cultures live.
- Pupils are elected as school councillors. They help to raise funds for others at Christmas time and for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.
- Punctuality is very good. Pupils are rarely late for school. Most pupils attend school regularly. A small minority are regularly absent, but school records show that these pupils are very unwell or have chronic health needs that limit their attendance. Leaders' liaison with families to get their children back into school has led to a reduction in persistent absence rates this year.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy enrichment activities such as yoga, drama and art club, and some sports activities, which add significantly to their personal development, health and well-being.
- The school also provides a Saturday club for pupils and their siblings to attend to learn and play together. This is popular with parents, one saying, 'My son goes to Saturday club at Woolgrove with his sister. They cook, play, draw and use computers. It is a very special time for them and they come home gushing with enthusiasm, excitement and happiness. What more could we ask for?'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- School records show that there are very few incidents of poor behaviour. Throughout the inspection, pupils were courteous, well mannered and pleasant. Exclusion from school is very rare.
- The school is a very calm, welcoming environment. Pupils are met as they arrive at school by staff, and are bid farewell as they board transport home at the end of each day. Pupils know that they can approach any adult in school if they are upset or have concerns.

- Pupils say there is little bullying because everyone is friendly. When incidents of name-calling or being unpleasant do occur, staff help them to sort things out.
- At breaktimes, conduct is exemplary. Pupils enjoy playing sensibly and safely together in mixed age and gender groups. They look after and protect one another.
- They know how to keep themselves safe, in school, at home and online.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Attainment on entry to the school is very low. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities, or an education, health and care plan. Due to their very low starting points, very few pupils meet age-related expectations. However, pupils make significant gains in their personal development, and in their academic progress.
- The care and support provided for pupils is excellent. This gives them the confidence and motivation to foster good relations with staff, develop friendships and engage fully in school life. This thorough grounding in social and communication skills ensures that they are well prepared for learning.
- Monitoring and assessment records show that all pupils make good progress. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work by inspectors confirmed that, currently, pupils are making sustained progress across a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- Good teaching and intensive support provided by teaching assistants enable pupils to build on their prior learning. They are shown what to do and how to develop resilience when work becomes challenging. They make good progress because they benefit greatly from the regular guidance, advice and support provided to help them learn.
- At times, some teaching assistants do too much for them, so pupils become too dependent on their support. The most effective teaching assistants facilitate learning in small groups. They encourage pupils to work by themselves for sustained periods of time without direct support.
- In the past, the impact of pupil premium funding on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils has not been routinely recorded accurately. Leaders have responded swiftly to this by increasing their monitoring of these pupils to show that they make similar progress to others.
- Observations by inspectors and scrutiny of pupils' books noted too few opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills. Opportunities to reinforce letter formation and basic handwriting in lessons are not always taken. Tasks involving speaking and listening, calculating, sorting and storytelling are not backed up with writing tasks. The impact of this is clearly evident in pupils' books. The least able writers do not practise handwriting often enough, and those who can write well do not have enough opportunities to write at length across a range of different subjects.
- Pupils' reading logs show that they read often in school. Many of them develop their reading further by reading to adults at home. Pupils who read aloud with inspectors showed a love of reading, and really enjoyed the stories they read. Most-able readers could decode long words phonetically with help, and explain their meaning. The least

able readers were at an early stage of developing their understanding of letters and sounds.

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Arrangements to aid their transition from Year 6 into secondary education are firmly established.

Early years provision

Good

- Good leadership ensures that children joining in Reception get off to a good start. Links between parents and staff ensure that, prior to their arrival, children's needs are known well, their personal needs are met and they are welcomed into school.
- Teachers and support staff work effectively as a team to safeguard children, stimulate their interest and curiosity, and teach the daily routines and behaviours expected of them. Staff teach children how to take turns, help others and to talk regularly with each other.
- Teaching is good. Children are provided with a wide range of resources to stimulate play and child-led learning. Staff make good use of resources to teach in small groups and engage children in teacher-led activities. A wide range of evidence is collated during learning and play to illustrate progress. This is shared with parents in children's learning journals.
- Children have daily opportunities for learning and play indoors, but limited outdoor facilities restrict children's free-flow between indoors and outside and hinder aspects of their learning, including physical development. School leaders acknowledge that this remains an important area for development which they are addressing.
- Many children join the school with underdeveloped speech and communication skills. Good teaching and additional therapy enable them to develop their speaking and listening, and to engage in further learning. For example, during snack time, children are encouraged to piece together sentences to ask for their chosen food, which helps to build confidence and increase their vocabulary.
- School records show that once children acquire the necessary speech and communication skills, the effective teaching of phonics enables them to develop a firm understanding of letters and sounds. They have fewer opportunities to record information and practise forming letters and their writing.
- Due to their very low starting points, the early years curriculum extends into Year 3. Detailed assessments show that, currently, children are developing or have secured a good understanding in all areas of the curriculum.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 137997 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10019216 |

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.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Academy special converter |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 125 |
| Appropriate authority | The academy trust |
| Chair | Brian Frederick |
| Headteacher | Lisa Hall |
| Telephone number | 01462 622 422 |
| Website | www.woolgrove.herts.sch.uk |
| Email address | head@woolgrove.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 30 April–1 May 2013 |

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is smaller than average.
- A new headteacher joined the school in 2016.
- The school caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, and underdeveloped speech, language and communication skills. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities, or an education, health and care plan.
- There are many more boys than girls on roll.

- The majority of pupils are white British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.
- The school provides outreach support for a large number of schools in the local area. The service was not inspected in detail during this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons, mostly with senior leaders. They carried out a learning walk to observe pupils at work and to assess the quality of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- They held meetings with senior and middle leaders, a group of recently qualified teachers, three governors including the chair of the governing body, a group of pupils and a representative of the local authority. They listened to four pupils read aloud.
- Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at the safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning, minutes of governors' meetings, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, and other information provided by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' books. They considered 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 13 free texts sent by parents and carers, and 29 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Helen Bailey

Ofsted Inspector

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