

Inspection of a good school: Woolgrove School, Special Needs Academy

Pryor Way, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 2PT

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 November 2022

Outcome

Woolgrove School, Special Needs Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils, parents and staff all agree that Woolgrove is a school where everyone 'lives, laughs and learns together'. Pupils thrive in this school. They are extremely happy, feel safe and thoroughly enjoy their learning.

The youngest children in Reception and new pupils to the school settle quickly. Most pupils are kind to each other and value the 'family' community. Over time, many pupils learn strategies to manage their emotions and behaviour. Behaviour in lessons is calm and purposeful. Bullying is rare. When it does happen, staff help pupils to cope with any anxieties they may have.

Pupils appreciate the support that teachers give them to help them learn. This includes when they struggle because they feel that the work is difficult. Parents who responded to the online questionnaire and who spoke to inspectors on site told us that they are happy with their child's progress and like the way the curriculum is adapted to suit pupils' needs. Many parents used words such as 'fabulous' and 'amazing' to describe the support their child receives. They value the commitment of leaders and staff in helping their child to succeed.

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

Since the last inspection, lots of things have got better. Leaders have thought hard about what they want each pupil to learn as they move through the school. They have an unwavering determination to provide the best learning experiences for all pupils. This is shared by governors and staff and is accomplished with skill and passion. As a result, pupils benefit from active and fun activities, which make them want to take part and learn.

In early years and beyond, the curriculum is well thought out. Pupils follow one of five 'pathways' depending on their needs. This ensures that all pupils learn the range of subjects on offer in ways which work for them and enables them to succeed.

Teachers usually teach the curriculum in an order which helps pupils to incrementally increase their knowledge. They tailor their approaches to each pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers make learning as practical as possible. This helps pupils to know and remember more. Typically, staff have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. In a small number of curriculum subjects there is some minor variation in the expertise of staff. Where this is the case, pupils do not make the best possible progress. Leaders are aware of this, and are already taking action to ensure that the ambitious curriculum is delivered consistently well

Teachers regularly check what the pupils already know and can do. The school use individual target tracking sheets. These include targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and other information about what teachers want the pupils to learn in each subject. Teachers monitor pupils' progress against these targets and tailor what they teach accordingly. The monitoring information is shared with parents, so they know what their child has been learning.

Reading and the development of pupils' communication skills are at the centre of the curriculum. Leaders and teachers share the ambition that every child will make as much progress as possible in being able to read. They have put in place a systematic approach to teaching phonics and early reading skills. This begins when pupils first start attending and continues to be a priority throughout their time in school. Pupils are given the opportunity to listen to and enjoy stories, nursery rhymes and non-fiction books. Adults read regularly to their class groups and parents are encouraged to share books with their children. As a result, leaders are realising their vision of pupils developing a love of reading.

The curriculum helps pupils understand how to stay physically and emotionally safe. Pupils are genuinely interested in the views of others and talk about their feelings freely. They are encouraged and supported to show consideration for each other's needs and difficulties. Pupils spoken to were aware of their own difficulties and talked about how they were helped when they felt anxious or angry.

Leaders make sure that pupils have a wide range of additional opportunities, including some residential visits. Pupils are encouraged to take part in elections to the school council and hearing pupil's views has a high priority. Pupils also enjoy sporting and music activities, and a group of pupils will be performing in a music concert at the Royal Albert Hall early next year.

Leaders and teachers are very reflective about their own practice and are determined to drive the school forward. Leaders take time to research any planned initiatives or changes, so that they can be confident that they are making the right choices. There is a remarkable sense of teamwork among staff, in a supportive atmosphere. Teaching assistants are highly effective and work very closely as a team with their class groups.

Leaders have worked hard to ensure work-life balance. Staff told us they appreciate that leaders listen to, and act on, any concerns they may have.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding. It is acknowledged that it is everyone's responsibility. Ensuring pupils are safe and happy is a major priority. From the time pupils join the school they are taught about how to keep themselves safe, not only in school but at home, online and in the community.

Leaders have strong systems in place to record any concerns. Staff are well trained to spot signs that pupils may be at risk and they have good relationships with parents and other agencies. These help make sure that pupils get the support they need. Parents are very appreciative of the support they receive from the family support and pastoral support workers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of curriculum subjects there is some minor variation in the expertise of staff. Where this is the case, pupils do not make the best possible progress. Leaders should continue with their planned programme of staff development, to support staff to teach all aspects of the curriculum consistently well.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 good in 21 and 22 February 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

Unique reference number	137997
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10211463
Type of school	Primary Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	125
Appropriate authority	The Academy Trust
Chair of the Governing Body	John Hayes; Julian Ekiert (co-chairs)
Headteacher	Lisa Hall
Website	http://www.woolgrove.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 and 22 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Woolgrove is a Special Needs Academy and is the only school within the Trust. All pupils have an EHC plan. The school is designated as a school for pupils with learning difficulties, speech and language and communication needs and autism spectrum disorder.
- The school roll has increased to 125 pupils this academic year. The local authority is funding and providing a modular building to cater for the increased pupil numbers. This is due to be finished in December 2022.
- The school does not use any alternative provision

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the provider received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the provider and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the provider.

- Inspectors conducted deep dives in early reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education, and art and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to adults teaching and/or supporting pupils, reviewed pupils' work and spoke to pupils about their learning. Inspectors also observed pupils reading to a familiar adult. The inspectors considered aspects of other subjects on the school curriculum.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders. They spoke to teaching assistants, early career teachers, the outreach and family and pastoral support team workers.
- The lead inspector met with all members of the trust and had a telephone conversation with the school's improvement partner.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with leaders of safeguarding, checked the single central record of pre-appointed checks, looked at safeguarding records and spoke with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors spoke to parents as they brought their children to school. They took account of the 45 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the 42 free-text comments. Inspectors also took note of the 46 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and 4 responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including the school development plan, minutes of trustee meetings and documentation relating to behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Lynda Walker, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Lesley Daniel

Ofsted Inspector

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