

Inspection of a good school: Woodlands Meed

Chanctonbury Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 9EY

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 October 2023

Outcome

Woodlands Meed continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils of all ages enjoy coming to Woodlands Meed. The school's wider curriculum has been carefully developed to give pupils a range of exciting and enriching experiences. For example, pupils are taken on a broad range of residential trips, which are planned to ensure that all pupils, including those with complex physical disabilities and/or medical conditions, can fully participate. Pupils talked with great pride about their performance last year at a local theatre to celebrate the school's 10-year anniversary.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They take great pride in their school community and strive to do their best in all learning. Pupils show great resilience when things are challenging. Staff focus on the school's values of perseverance, respect, adaptability, communication, teamwork, independence, creativity and emotional regulation to support pupils in developing the right behaviours and attitudes.

Pupils told inspectors how much they look forward to the weekly celebration assemblies where the stars of the week, who have shown the school's values, are celebrated. Pupils are proud when their own success is recognised. They also take great joy in the successes of their friends and classmates. Pupils are already anticipating the end-of-year celebration when house points are added up and the winning house chooses a celebration for all pupils.

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

Staff and leaders at all levels are ambitious for every pupil. Some pupils have a bespoke curriculum based on their education, health and care (EHC) plan, while others study national curriculum subjects. The school has developed clear curriculums for all subjects and pupil pathways. Some areas of the curriculum, for example mathematics, physical development and physical education (PE), are very well established. Leaders know that in these subjects, pupils make good progress against their EHC plan targets and, where appropriate, against the school's planned curriculum.

In other subjects and pathways, the curriculum is at an earlier stage of development. For example, leaders have recently relaunched their curriculum for pupils with complex needs. The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) has also recently been redeveloped to better meet the needs of all pupils. Leaders plan to monitor these new areas of the curriculum carefully over the course of this academic year to ensure that they support and enable pupils in the way leaders intend.

Leaders at all levels have made extensive improvements to the reading curriculum since the last inspection. Staff work to help pupils overcome the negative feelings they might have about their own reading abilities, championing the school's vision that 'reading is our superpower'. As a result, pupils read more frequently and with more pleasure.

Staff have carefully chosen books that really engage pupils in reading and with the school's English curriculum. Pupils of all ages are read to regularly. Reading is recognised and celebrated across the curriculum and across the learning pathways. For example, pupils in food technology lessons are supported to recognise that when they follow a recipe, they are reading. Staff recognise that when pupils engage with and respond to symbols, they are demonstrating vital pre-reading behaviours, and this too is recognised and celebrated.

To prepare the youngest children to begin to learn to read, there is a sharp focus on developing their communication and interaction right from the start. Many pupils are not yet talking when they begin school. Some will be supported to develop their speech and language. Others will be supported to learn to communicate in other ways. All children are carefully supported to begin to focus their attention on an adult-led activity. For some pupils, this will remain a focus throughout their time at school.

Children who are developmentally ready start the school's phonics programme. Initially, there is a strong focus on tuning children in to environmental sounds before staff begin to teach letter sounds. The school has identified that older pupils, who are not yet reading fluently, would benefit from further support with their phonics. There are plans in place to address this.

Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) are very well supported in a caring and nurturing environment. Pupils follow a bespoke curriculum that is fully underpinned by their EHC plans. Staff are well supported by the therapy team to precisely plan what each pupil needs to work on next. Staff are highly ambitious for pupils. They carefully adapt and tailor aspects of the school's academic curriculum to enable pupils to engage and develop. For example, pupils enjoy hearing staff sing the school's phonics song. Some were able to gesture to identify which letter a sound related to.

Leaders have redeveloped their curriculum and careers programme to ensure that pupils with SEND are given the best possible chance of gaining employment when they reach adulthood. Leaders have developed a broad range of work experience and enterprise opportunities for pupils, in the school and beyond. The school carefully tracks pupils' destinations and regularly invites former pupils back into school to share their successful experiences in the workplace.

Senior leaders, and governors, are highly committed to the school and its pupils. They share a clear vision for a school that is enjoyable and enriching for pupils, and which prepares them for the fullest life in the future. Leaders and governors are consistently ambitious for their pupils and what they can achieve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all staff who teach pupils at an early stage of learning to read and write are trained to teach phonics. This means that staff do not always have the subject knowledge they require to explain learning clearly and understand the gaps in pupils' phonemic knowledge. This is particularly the case for older pupils and students. Leaders need to ensure that all staff who teach pupils at an early stage of learning to read and write are expert in the teaching and application of phonics knowledge.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2014.

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	136114
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10287997
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	274
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Marion Wilcock
Headteacher	Adam Rowland
Website	www.woodlandsmeed.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 June 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is registered to take children from age two. In practice, children generally join the school when they are Reception age. However, children with PMLD sometimes join the school earlier, as their needs may preclude them being able to attend another nursery setting. At the time of this inspection, no two-year-olds were on the school's roll.
- The school is a 'generic' special school, catering for pupils with a broad range of SEND, including PMLD, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, autism, and social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils on roll have an EHC plan. All pupils are placed by a local authority.
- The school uses two unregistered alternative providers and one registered alternative provider.
- The main school is located at Chanctonbury Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 9EY. The school has a separate site, which it refers to as its 'college site'. This is located at

Birchwood Grove Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex RH15 0DP. At the time of this inspection, the school was in the final stages of a rebuild of the college site. Phase one of the college rebuild is due to be completed by December 2023. It is expected that older pupils and students will begin to occupy the building from January 2024.

- 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 judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing board and spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, early reading, mathematics, and physical development and PE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors discussed the curriculum for some other subjects, including PSHE, with leaders.
- 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' interests first.
- Inspectors considered pupils' behaviour and attitudes throughout the inspection and discussed the school's analysis of pupils' behaviour and attendance with leaders. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about the school's personal development programme, including its careers provision.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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