

Inspection of Woodlands School

Tilley Green, Wem, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 5PJ

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Julia Taylor. This school is part of the Marches Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sarah Finch, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alex Fry.

What is it like to attend this school?

Everyone talks about the importance of being in the 'Woodlands family'. This is a happy school. Staff and their pupils get along well and staff want the very best outcomes for pupils.

Pupils have often had some disruption in their learning before joining Woodlands, and some have displayed negative behaviours in the past. Staff in this school believe that every pupil deserves a fresh start. They understand how to support pupils' social and emotional needs well. As a result, once pupils join Woodlands, their behaviour improves quickly. Bullying at the school is rare.

Older pupils are well prepared for life after school and can access a range of relevant qualifications. There are many exciting opportunities including attending sporting events and visiting local places of interest. The school is working hard with providers to broaden work experience opportunities.

Leaders have recently reviewed the curriculum. Teachers know the important knowledge that pupils need to learn. However, in some subjects the curriculum does not flow as well as it needs to from the primary to the secondary phase. Reading is important in this school, but the school's strategies to teach reading are not as effective as they need to be to enable all pupils to read fluently.

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

The school has recently reviewed the curriculum, which is now planned and sequenced across all subjects. Leaders have considered the important content that will help pupils improve their reading, writing and mathematics. Some subjects are at an early stage of implementation.

Currently, not all teachers are adapting how they teach subject content. This means that pupils are not consistently securing and retaining all of the important knowledge they need. Not all teachers know how to assess pupils' prior knowledge. Where this is the case, they do not know how to identify and address any gaps that pupils have in their knowledge. This means that pupils are sometimes given activities that are not well adapted to their needs. When pupils are given work which is too easy or too hard, they tend to lose focus in lessons.

There is a well understood reading strategy across the whole school. Some staff are experts at teaching reading. However, not all teachers have the knowledge to deliver the school's phonics curriculum with the precision it needs. This means that some pupils do not learn to read as well as they could. During reading lessons, pupils have books which are well matched to their reading age. However, the school also has an array of other books in school that pupils can read. These are not always matched to pupils' reading abilities and interests. This makes it harder for

pupils to retain interest in learning to read and to develop a love of reading for pleasure, particularly for those who are at the earliest stages of learning to read.

Staff know their pupils well and understand the ways that they communicate their wishes and concerns. The behaviour policy is clear and tailored to the needs of pupils. Pupil-specific strategies are used well by staff to calm situations where pupils are upset. When there is a need to physically support a pupil, staff are considerate and do so only when it is in the best interest of the pupil in order to keep them safe. Staff always find the time to talk with pupils about any concern they have. As a result, the school is calm and friendly, and pupils' unwanted behaviours reduce over time.

Older pupils are well supported as they transition into education or training. Pupils work with an independent careers advisor who understands their needs. Staff know that older pupils often get anxious about leaving school and also worry about doing work experience. To support pupils with these concerns, staff create personalised programmes using work experience opportunities in school first. When they are ready, pupils then access external placements. This happens at a place matched to the pupil's talents and interests.

The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum teaches pupils how to be healthy and stay safe, and prepares them for life and work. Pupils learn about different cultures. They understand the importance of tolerance and respect and about protected characteristics. The PSHE curriculum is designed so that pupils can revisit important knowledge. This helps pupils retain key information. Personalised support is given to those pupils who need it. For instance, older pupils regularly practice and apply their learning in real-life contexts. Students take part in many activities. They engage with enterprise initiatives and practise cooking, cleaning and homecare in the school bungalow.

Trustees and local governors are knowledgeable about the school. They are committed to improving pupils' life chances. School leaders feel well supported by the trust. Together they are improving many aspects of the school. Trustees and school leaders know that there is more work to do to secure a good quality of education. Together they have devised plans to address school priorities, in order to ensure that pupils are learning well, behaving well and attending school regularly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders have not considered carefully enough how knowledge is built from the primary phase into the secondary phase of education. As a result, at this transition point pupils are not always able to link new learning with prior

learning. The school should ensure that all subject areas in the curriculum are designed to build knowledge seamlessly from the primary phase into the secondary phase.

- In some subjects, teachers do not use assessment well enough to check that pupils have understood what has been taught. This means that misconceptions are not identified or addressed as quickly as they should be. The school needs to ensure that all teachers use assessment consistently well to check pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching so that all pupils can gain and retain new knowledge.
- The phonics curriculum has not been consistently well implemented across the whole school. This means that not all pupils are learning how to sound, segment and blend words well enough. This is stopping some pupils from learning to read fluently quickly enough. The school should make sure that all staff have the necessary expertise to deliver the phonics curriculum well so that pupils gain effective reading strategies as soon as they can.

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	148437
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10294716
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alex Fry
Headteacher	Julia Taylor
Website	www.woodlands.school
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school converted to an academy in April 2021.
- The school is part of Marches Academy Trust.
- The school uses five registered and one unregistered alternative provider.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the CEO, the director of school improvement from the trust, other leaders from the trust, trustees and governors who sit on the local governing board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, early reading, art and PSHE. 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 also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- 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 reviewed a range of documents provided by the school.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils about the wider work of the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of behaviour, including those about bullying, and records of suspensions. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text responses. Inspectors also took account of responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Jane Edgerton, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Heather Phillips

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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