

Inspection of an outstanding school: Treetops School

Buxton Road, Grays, Essex RM16 2WU

Inspection dates:

11–12 February 2020

Outcome

Treetops School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Treetops School is a very special place. From the moment they enter the school, pupils know that they are valued and wanted. All adults, whatever their role, want the very best for each pupil. They go out of their way to ensure that pupils get it. Leaders and staff are determined that all pupils will achieve as well as they possibly can.

Parents and carers greatly value the education the school provides. In many cases, pupils have had a difficult educational journey by the time they reach the school. Parents said that arriving at Treetops felt as if their child had 'come home'. One parent said, 'Treetops has changed my son's life.' Another wrote: 'My child is like a different child at this school compared to his last one, he is totally included in all different activities, he wakes up happy to get on his school bus.' These comments are typical of those made by parents.

Pupils behave very well at Treetops. Bullying is extremely rare. The very high staffing levels and staff's great vigilance mean that there is little opportunity for bullying to happen.

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

Treetops has been outstanding for a long time, but no one takes this for granted. There is no complacency. Leaders, staff and governors are always looking for ways to improve the school. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are very high. Pupils are not defined by their learning difficulties.

The school's curriculum is exceptionally well thought out. Staff routinely adapt and develop the curriculum to make sure that pupils' individual needs are met. This means that pupils make very strong progress from their own personal starting points. For example, autistic pupils who enter the school with no speech and unable to communicate quickly learn to make a simple request.

Staff know each pupil as an individual extremely well. Staff continually assess pupils to see whether teaching has been effective. They think carefully about what needs to be changed to make it even better.

The communication curriculum is a particular strength of the school. Rightly, it has a very high priority. For example, the school employs qualified speech and language therapists, who are an integral part of the teaching team. This has helped to ensure that the communication curriculum is highly effective.

Staff use a wide range of approaches to communication. They are skilled in ensuring that they use the right approach for each pupil. For example, many pupils are taught a simplified form of sign language. This enables them to make themselves understood. Other pupils learn how to make or respond to requests in a socially acceptable manner.

The curriculum is always improving. Leaders check provision closely to see what is working well and what could improve. Reading is an example of this. The headteacher recognised that although already strong, reading could be better. Leaders took immediate action to improve phonics teaching. For example, they provided extra phonics training for staff. As a result, phonics is now taught very well, and pupils are making even better progress.

Pupils behave very well. Staff are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour. For example, many pupils display challenging behaviour that is a result of their difficulty or disability. The way that staff deal with these behaviours lessens their frequency and severity. The school is a very calm place, where pupils are able to learn well.

The school's wider curriculum is also highly effective. As well as learning about subjects in the national curriculum, pupils take part in a wide range of other activities, such as yoga. Special sessions encourage autistic pupils to focus and interact with others. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also given a high priority.

Older pupils work towards a range of qualifications, according to their individual needs. Some pupils achieve GCSEs in English, mathematics and, sometimes, other subjects. Other pupils gain BTEC or entry-level qualifications. Pupils learn about different careers. They are given practical experiences in areas such as hospitality and construction.

Students who are not ready to move on to college often stay on into the school's sixth form. The sixth form provides students with a wide range of opportunities. For example, students go on work-experience placements. Students continue to develop essential skills, such as English, mathematics and communication, throughout their time in the sixth form.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school's designated safeguarding leads are well trained for the role. They have an excellent understanding of the crucial importance of effective safeguarding. They recognise the particular vulnerabilities of some pupils. Leaders have put strong measures in place to

protect pupils. They have ensured that all staff receive regular training to help them to recognise and report possible signs of abuse and neglect. The school uses an electronic system for recording such concerns. Records show that staff report concerns promptly. Where necessary, leaders take swift action to protect pupils when concerns are raised.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, also called Treetops School, to be outstanding in November 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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	144234
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10121426
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	309
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	48
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alan Peaford
Headteacher	Jon Brewer
Website	www.treetopsschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- Treetops School converted to become an academy school on 1 April 2017. When its predecessor school, also called Treetops School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- At the same time that it converted to become an academy, the school also became the founding member of the Treetops Learning Community, a multi-academy trust. There are currently no other schools in the trust. However, it is anticipated that a new free school, to provide similar education to the existing school, will open on a neighbouring site in September 2021.
- Treetops School is a large special school for pupils with learning difficulties. The school provides both for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties and for those with autism spectrum disorder and associated learning difficulties and developmental delay. An increasing proportion of pupils have severe learning disabilities.
- The school is arranged in two separate pathways, one for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and one for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. Pupils who follow

the autism spectrum disorder pathway have severe communication difficulties and/or developmental delay.

- The school follows a particular approach to learning, known as 'ABA' (applied behaviour analysis). Pupils on the autism spectrum disorder pathway are taught using an approach known as 'VB' (verbal behaviour). The school provides information about these approaches on its website.
- The school's long-standing headteacher stepped down from the post in July 2019. He continues to work for the multi-academy trust on a part-time basis. The school's current headteacher took up his post in September 2019.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP).
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- We met with the trust's chief executive officer, the headteacher and other senior leaders, leaders responsible for individual subjects, teachers and pupils, a representative of the local authority, the chair of trustees and a member of the governing body.
- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, we checked the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks, met the school's designated safeguarding leads, spoke with staff and pupils and checked the school's electronic child protection records.
- We observed and talked to pupils during their breaktimes and as they moved about the school.
- We considered a range of school documents.
- We spoke to parents as they brought their children to school. We took account of 66 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and 84 responses to the staff survey. We also considered 35 responses to Parent View and 34 free-text comments from parents.
- We looked in depth at the following subjects: reading, mathematics, communication and art. We met with the leaders of these subjects, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, spoke with pupils about their work, spoke to teachers and listened to pupils read.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Randall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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