

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Treetops School

Buxton Road, Grays, Essex RM16 2WU

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 March 2025

Outcome

Treetops School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Jon Brewer. This school is part of Treetops Learning Community, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Paul Smith, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alan Peaford.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils receive an exceptional all-round educational experience at this school. Staff have an unstinting drive to achieve the highest success for pupils, whether that is skiing in Pila, appearing on television or performing in a national arena. There is no limit to what pupils can try, taking into account their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils flourish at this school. Many meet and exceed the targets on their education, health and care plans (EHC plans).

The friendly and warm ethos provides a supportive learning environment for pupils. Pupils learn how to manage their emotions, how to make friends and how to look after one another. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Pupils have a high regard for the staff. Pupils want to stop and talk and ask about their day. Pupils appreciate the high-fives in corridors and the plentiful smiles. Sixth-form students are proud to mentor younger pupils.

Pupils participate fully in all that the school has to offer. The school council, for example, has worked with the University of Portsmouth to design the revamp of a bus into a study space for the pupils to enjoy.

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

The school has invested a large amount of thought and creativity into developing its curriculum. The changing profile of pupils' needs has altered the way in which the school structures its curriculum. The differing pathways ensure that pupils get the input they need, whether this is learning to communicate or achieving qualifications to secure their next steps in education, employment or training. The curriculum in each pathway builds pupils' knowledge and understanding logically. Staff provide various opportunities to revisit learning. For example, pupils handle reptiles in science week to develop further their knowledge and understanding of vertebrates.

Preparation for adulthood integrates seamlessly throughout the curriculum. This begins in the primary phase, where pupils learn how to navigate in the local community and how to seek help. Staff watch pupils' acquisition of skills closely and adjust their programmes of learning accordingly. When pupils struggle to learn how to swim, for instance, staff facilitate more practice, enabling pupils to become able to swim 25 metres. Several pupils now compete in swimming galas as a result. Older pupils and sixth-form students learn how to be independent and self-reliant. The use of the school's vocational facilities helps students to understand the maintenance of property. They learn how to paint and decorate a room or landscape a garden. Sixth-form students articulate well the benefits of the curriculum. They talk confidently about how to lead a 'full life' and have the courage to try something new.

The development of pupils' communication and language skills is at the heart of the school's work. Pupils' needs are identified quickly and addressed. Staff support pupils' communication needs very well. They draw on a wide range of support to remove barriers to learning. Staff are well trained in using a range of communication aids and strategies, such as helping pupils express themselves by visual boards. Teachers, therapists and teaching assistants work well together to give timely and constructive guidance to pupils. This means that pupils learn to read using phonics in a way that is appropriate for them. There is a lot of practice and reinforcement so that pupils develop fluency quickly. The pleasure of reading permeates school life. The two libraries and book corners in classrooms are well used.

Careers education is a strength of the school. Younger pupils aspire to work in the on-site café like the sixth-form students do or help in the community gymnasium for adults with disabilities. Workplace encounters and visiting speakers are a prominent feature in pupils' experience of school. The personal development offer in the school is wide. Pupils have access to a range of extracurricular clubs and leadership opportunities. They learn about healthy lifestyles, faith and other cultures through a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education curriculum. Pupils and sixth-form students learn about healthy relationships and the importance of consent in ways that are appropriate to their age and needs.

The trust and leaders at all levels are determined to give pupils a world-class education. They look carefully at what the school offers through the eyes of the pupils, for instance what you experience as a non-verbal communicator. The trust and governors make sure

that the welfare of all is at the forefront of decision-making. This includes the workload and well-being of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 predecessor school, Treetops School, to be outstanding for overall effectiveness 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 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	144234
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10378569
Type of school	Special
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	326
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	63
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alan Peaford
CEO of the trust	Paul Smith
Headteacher	Jon Brewer
Website	www.treetopsschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with: moderate learning difficulties; speech, language and communication difficulties; autism; and social, emotional and mental health needs. An increasing proportion of pupils have severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school has grown in size and is currently operating over the number of pupils it can accommodate according to its registration.
- The school also functions as a community hub for adults with SEND, offering a range of services, including sporting facilities.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

- 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 evaluation 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 chair of the trust, the CEO, the headteacher, senior leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector held telephone discussions with the chair of the local governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors considered the improvements leaders are undertaking in the school, such as how they are providing for increased numbers of pupils with autism and severe learning difficulties.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their experiences of school and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during their social time.
- 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 the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire and parents' free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff survey.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Mullan

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025