

TreeHouse School

Woodside Avenue, Muswell Hill, London, N10 3JA

Inspection dates 24–25 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The passion, commitment and skills of the school team are highly effective in creating an outstanding school.
- Pupils make outstanding progress because the teaching team has a consistent, persistent, calm and methodical approach to setting challenges for individuals.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. The high level of care and exceptional attention to detail helps pupils to quickly settle into the school and feel safe.
- Many pupils join the school with extreme behaviours that have resulted in exclusion from other schools. Pupils learn how to recognise and manage their own behaviour better.
- Pupils achieve exceptionally well from starting points that are well below those expected for their age because work is set at the right level and their progress is checked regularly.
- The governing body are active in supporting and challenging the work of the school. They question the way things are done and scrutinise results well.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Pupils are given an exceptional experience that prepares them very well for the future challenges in life.
- Teaching is outstanding. There is a clear and highly effective approach to planning lessons. Staff work together extremely well to support each pupil. The progress of some pupils could be increased by setting precise targets to promote outstanding achievement.
- Teachers and applied behaviour analysis (ABA) tutors are highly skilled and work well with other professionals so that pupils' achievements are maximised.
- The headteacher is an exceptional leader and is supported by an outstanding senior team. They know the school very well, prioritising issues and tackling them rapidly.
- The leadership and development of teaching and learning in the school is excellent. Leaders at all levels think carefully about what effect they are having and are constantly looking for ways of doing things even better.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, and looked at how teachers and tutors worked with individual pupils as well as observing the school's work around the building. The senior leaders joined inspectors during many of the observations.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, teachers, ABA tutors, other adults in the school, the Chair of the Governing Body, a representative of the proprietor and a university research partner.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including policy documents, those relating to safeguarding arrangements and development plans. The school's information about pupils' progress and case studies were scrutinised and monitoring reports considered.
- The views of parents and carers were considered through emails received and the 13 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- Staff views were considered through the responses to the 22 optional questionnaires completed at the time of the inspection and through meetings with teachers and support staff.

Inspection team

Paul Scott, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janev Mehmet-Christofides

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- TreeHouse School is for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Many have learning difficulties, including speech, language, communication and sensory needs. Almost all pupils have difficulties in behavioural, emotional and social development.
- Pupils come from a wide geographical area in London and beyond.
- Around 90% of pupils are male.
- Pupils of minority ethnic heritage make up just over half of the school population.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is around twice that of schools nationally. Local authorities do not currently pass this funding onto the school.
- The school shares its purpose-built building with the charitable trust, Ambitious about Autism, which is the proprietor of the school.
- The school bases its work on the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and, as well as teachers, ABA tutors work very closely with pupils to support learning.
- The school has been awarded Autism Accreditation annually since 2004.
- The school does not use other organisations to provide training but does make use of links with other schools and businesses to give students wider learning experiences away from school. These activities are fully supervised by TreeHouse staff.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase progress of some pupils even more by setting precise targets for outstanding achievement across all areas of their learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Pupils make exceptional progress, particularly in developing their communication skills. Many pupils join the school unable to effectively communicate their feelings and frustrations. Professionals such as the school's speech and language therapists work closely with teachers and ABA professionals to ensure an effective communication plan is successfully implemented.
- The school checks how well pupils are doing by recording a wide range of information and analysing this very well. This shows that although pupils' starting points are well below those expected for their age, most pupils achieve the very challenging targets set. The school is also working with partners such as university researchers to establish more effective ways of defining and measuring pupils' outstanding progress with greater precision.
- Pupils' progress in reading is very good through clear use of symbols or words. During a science lesson, pupils used symbols and written instructions with confidence to explore properties of light. This was supported by ABA tutors very well but some pupils could make even greater progress at times if all opportunities to discuss work were used.
- Pupils all have very specific and challenging needs and so subjects and the range of skills that are taught are tailored to each individual. Due to the challenges that pupils face the standards reached by the end of the school are very low. Achievement is, however, outstanding for all groups within the school, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and in the sixth form.
- The school rightly focuses on pupils enjoying learning and on preparing pupils for life beyond the school boundaries. A number of pupils spend time working in the community through superb business links. This is a particularly strong element of the school's work. Pupils' achieve a very high degree of independence, taking into account the particular challenges that they face.
- The school has developed effective work-related opportunities for pupils, including in horticulture and catering. Pupils do well on these courses because they are well taught, develop increased independence and build confidence.
- The social detectives programme in the school helps pupils to talk with each other and adults. It is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate confidence and practise skills pupils are developing in communication. During one lesson, pupils worked well together, enjoying support from each other as well as developing a range of conversational skills. The teacher guided pupils carefully and used her voice very effectively, making sure all were successful.
- The school does not receive the pupil premium funding from the local authorities responsible for the pupils. Case study analysis and scrutiny of achievements relating to individual pupils provide secure evidence that all groups within the school make outstanding progress over time.
- GCSE examinations are not taken by pupils currently and so there are no early entries.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because a wide range of professionals work very well together to ensure pupils learn outstandingly well. Teachers, ABA professionals and other supporting adults know pupils very well. Planning is thorough and opportunities to make outstanding progress are provided to all pupils.
- ABA tutors and supervisors undertake a great deal of teaching of individual pupils; they help support the excellent learning very well indeed. Opportunities to practise skills are extensive. During a motivating physical education lesson, language skills were combined with learning mathematics and physical skills. This built confidence and enjoyment. The excellent use of symbols and the enthusiasm of the teacher are typical of the excellent teaching across the school.
- Expectations of pupils are high and clear. There are clear steps in learning and rewards for success. Pupils know what they need to do and can work with greater confidence and increasing independence. There are times when the challenge could be even higher, particularly for more

able pupils. What outstanding progress looks like for some pupils needs to be more precisely defined for some activities to promote even greater progress.

- Rewards are used extremely skilfully by teachers. This means that pupils are motivated and time is used well as pupils concentrate on working towards goals.
- The team approach means pupils work with a range of adults and do not rely on specific members of staff for support and guidance. Pupils and staff still build close relationships and this trust promotes outstanding learning and progress. Parents and carers recognise the dedication of the staff and generally agree teaching is of high quality.
- Teachers and ABA professionals check pupils' progress in great detail throughout lessons and use assessment information to appropriately adapt learning activities. During a music lesson, the teacher skilfully redirected the work of an enthusiastic pupil to ensure the activities were of maximum benefit. During the same lesson, the ABA tutor carefully recorded a pupil's responses to the teacher's requests, to inform the next steps in learning.
- The leadership and development of teaching and learning in the school is excellent. ABA tutors also undertake an impressive two-year development programme. Leaders are skilled at building on the strengths of the team as well as tackling any weaknesses and nurturing talent.
- The opportunities for training teachers and other adults in the school are exceptional. There is extensive research work being undertaken in the school, including working with universities. This has helped to ensure that the school keeps questioning the quality of its work. There is no room for complacency.
- The teaching of a lesson for TreeHouse pupils, working with neighbouring primary school pupils, was an inspiring example of how to develop learning that involves all pupils, fosters good relations and helps everybody to understand and accept differences between people. Pupils worked together extremely well. All pupils were benefiting in different ways. The thoughtful summary with the local primary pupils showed how they are also beginning to understand issues relating to autism.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour improves quickly when they join the school and previous extreme behaviours are reduced significantly. This is because the pupils are aware that the TreeHouse team give them so much love and exceptional care.
- The school has developed opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own health. The dental suite is used well to reduce anxiety and has improved the teeth-cleaning habits of pupils. Many pupils are now able to attend dental appointments with the school's dentist or their own family dentist.
- The TreeHouse team are very well trained and understand the processes to be used to ensure pupils are properly safeguarded and their welfare and well-being are promoted effectively. Safety is a high priority.
- During lessons and around the school, there is a calm and positive atmosphere. Pupils enjoy learning and relish the wide range of opportunities that they get. Parents and carers have been impressed with improvement in behaviour and how this has transferred to the home.
- Pupils take increasing control of their own behaviour as they grow up. They are helped to recognise things that upset them or make them anxious. For example, when low levels of noise in the classroom were too much, one pupil requested permission to leave and returned a few minutes later to complete his work; another pupil used ear defenders and continued working successfully.
- At times, pupils become agitated by a range of factors. This is extremely well managed by staff and quickly calmed with support when needed. This rarely stops others from working and all concerned quickly return to work.
- Many pupils join the school because they have not been successful in controlling behaviour in previous schools. At TreeHouse, they quickly develop ways of communicating that are more productive and there are dramatic improvements when they settle into the school.
- Attendance is slightly lower in the sixth form but attendance overall is around the national average. Pupils reported how much they enjoyed coming to school. A small number of pupils

have medical appointments that have disrupted their attendance but this is managed very well.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is passionate and demonstrates a determination to ensure that all pupils are given the best opportunity to succeed. She is extremely well assisted by the senior team, wider leadership team, other leaders and staff. The senior leaders are visible and approachable and have helped staff to develop very well.
- Morale in the school is understandably high and staff are proud to be associated with the school. They feel supported and appreciate that they are a part of a strong team that work well together.
- There is a clear shared vision for the school. A clear and effective strategy has been developed for being the best and no complacency has come with the successes so far. There is a steely determination to learn from the mistakes and successes to make things even better.
- The leadership of the sixth form is highly effective and demonstrates the wider school commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity. The school follows a principle of preparing pupils for life beyond school and successfully develops independence in a wide range of ways. This includes the use of technologies such as mobile electronic devices to make sure pupils can communicate effectively in the community.
- Leaders monitor teaching and learning extremely effectively. A range of meetings ensure all concerned are aware of the progress of all pupils. Leaders do not always define precisely enough what some aspects of outstanding progress might look like and so higher progress is sometimes missed.
- The social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils is extremely positive. Pupils who have previously led very isolated lives are able to engage with others and feel the pride and warmth of personal successes.
- **The governance of the school:**

Governors are very committed and supportive of the school. They are improving the very effective work they currently do by looking at how they can have even more impact in their roles. They understand the quality of teaching and are knowledgeable about pupils' progress and how it compares to that of similar pupils nationally. Governors understand performance management issues well and are well informed about issues relating to promotion and salary progression. Governors are working hard to challenge local authorities to pass on the pupil premium for pupils who are eligible for this additional funding.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	135534
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	402712

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lorraine Petersen OBE
Headteacher	Dr Julie O'Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	December 2009
Telephone number	020 8815 5424
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