

Calthorpe Academy

Darwin Street, Highgate, Birmingham, West Midlands B12 0TP

Inspection dates

28–29 November 2017

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| 16 to 19 study programmes | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Inadequate |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the previous inspection, Calthorpe has been transformed. The school is extremely well led. The principal, ably supported by leaders, has led the school very effectively through a period of rapid change. All aspects of the school are now good and are improving week by week.
- Pupils are very well cared for. Safeguarding is at the heart of all that the school does. The school is a calm and welcoming place, where pupils' enjoyment of learning is evident.
- Calthorpe aims to give pupils the skills they need for their life beyond school. Pupils make good progress in communicating, by speaking, signing or using symbols.
- From the moment they join the school, pupils are taught to develop their independence as far as possible. The youngest pupils are making particularly rapid progress. Some of the older pupils, including students in the sixth form, have not been taught these skills well enough in the past, but are now making good progress.
- Staff are skilled at building excellent relationships with pupils and getting to know their needs. They teach pupils a range of strategies to manage their own behaviour, and they manage any challenging behaviour expertly and pleasantly.
- The most able pupils are starting to make good progress in reading and writing. While some staff are skilled at teaching early reading, others are less so. The teaching of writing has improved significantly, but opportunities to write at length are not frequent enough.
- Teachers have started to make good use of visits into the local community and beyond, which is increasing pupils' confidence throughout the school. Leaders are determined to extend this work further.
- Leaders of departments have an excellent knowledge of the needs of their pupils. Supported by senior leaders, they have made radical and highly effective changes to the ways in which classes are organised and to the way in which pupils are taught.
- The school's work with parents is developing well. Parents are much better informed about their children's education than they have been. Leaders are committed to extending this work to include all parents.
- The board of directors has been instrumental in enabling and supporting all the positive changes that have taken place in the school over the last 18 months.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the recently established strategies for engaging parents and carers in their children's education to ensure that this positive work reaches a greater number of families.
- Extend the opportunities that pupils of all ages and abilities have to get to know and be seen in the wider community in order to develop their independence, confidence and skills for life beyond school.
- Further improve the most able pupils' reading and writing skills by:
 - ensuring that staff are skilled at teaching phonics and other relevant strategies to support early reading
 - providing frequent opportunities for the most able pupils to write at length.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal set a very clear direction for the school as soon as he took up his post. Together with the two vice-principals, he systematically and determinedly set about tackling each of the school's weaknesses. These three leaders are a very strong and highly effective team, which has had an outstanding impact on the school's effectiveness. They empower and support other senior and middle leaders. Their vision for the future of the school is clear – only excellence in all areas will be acceptable for Calthorpe's pupils.
- Other senior leaders and leaders of the different departments – primary, secondary, sixth form, autism and complex needs – are also highly effective in their roles. Together, they have helped to set the new direction for the school's work. They support and challenge the staff for whom they are responsible, monitor pupils' progress extremely carefully and intervene when needed. Teaching and support staff are highly motivated to make sure that pupils achieve as well as they possibly can. Medical staff who previously operated quite separately from school staff now support pupils in their lessons and are a valued part of the staff team.
- Leaders have a strong, positive presence around the school. They consistently model the way that they want staff to interact with pupils.
- Leaders and staff have worked together to design their own very well-structured curriculum that is focused throughout on 'skills for the life we want'. The clear philosophy and aims have led to teaching and learning activities that are far more meaningful for pupils than they have been in the past.
- Staff now understand why they are doing what they are doing and how one small step of learning links to another and then to others far into the future. There is a strong, highly relevant emphasis on developing pupils' independence. At the same time, the curriculum is leading to lessons that are enjoyable and purposeful, with fun and enrichment built in. Although new, the curriculum is already having a significantly positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. Art, music, dance, drama and sport all enrich pupils' experiences.
- Extra-curricular activities are developing well. The outdoor area has been remodelled to give pupils a good range of leisure activities to take part in at lunchtime, including football, dancing, playing with bubbles, relaxing on huge beanbags and building with Lego in a specially designed outdoor space. Specially designed equipment allows younger pupils, including those who use wheelchairs, to go on roundabouts and swings, while others can choose to climb. Older autistic pupils can go swimming or to a 'sensory club' where they can relax.
- Systems to assess pupils' progress are comprehensive. Leaders continually analyse and respond to the assessment information that staff provide. As a result, if pupils are not making the progress they should, intervention happens very quickly and no one is allowed to fall behind.
- Leaders have developed sophisticated systems for understanding and managing behaviour, grounded in research theory and practice. Leaders have ensured that staff

have received high-quality professional development in understanding and managing pupils' behaviour, linked to pupils' communication and sensory needs. As a result, incidents of challenging behaviour have reduced significantly over the last year.

- Leaders have established systems for communication throughout the school that are consistent, understood by all and enable pupils to understand their environment and communicate their needs effectively. Leaders' investment in a full-time speech and language therapist for the school has enhanced the approaches to communication.
- Leaders have increased the number of therapists and other specialists working in the school. The increased amount of physiotherapy is having a positive impact on the provision for pupils who have complex needs.
- The school building is a series of awkward spaces, with some small classrooms and some cramped corridors. Leaders have worked hard to improve this situation, changing the functions of different rooms, re-decorating, having walls added or moved where they can. Good work has been done to the outside spaces, which are now far more inviting. New therapeutic spaces have been created inside the school. Leaders and directors are exploring what can be done next to make the building more suited to pupils' needs.
- Additional government funding – pupil premium, catch-up and sports premium – is carefully allocated, and the additional provision is having a positive impact on pupils' experiences and outcomes. Leaders carefully analyse the impact of the additional funding and alter its allocation if needed.
- Work with parents and carers has developed well over the last two terms. A well-designed home-school diary is enabling staff and parents to communicate daily about pupils' well-being and their learning. A series of workshops has brought some parents into school to learn about different topics, such as how their children are taught mathematics. Staff have invited parents of the youngest children into school to 'stay and play'. Many parents have attended meetings in school to find out about their children's progress. Leaders are well aware, however, that currently some parents are not engaged with the school's work, and are determined to find better ways to work with these parents.
- The principal continually seeks external challenge. Specialist consultants, university researchers and leaders from other schools have all been engaged to help the school to improve. Training and coaching for leaders and staff are of a high quality and enable them to be very effective. This outward-looking approach has been very effective in helping the school to develop some very good approaches to basic processes alongside some truly innovative work to help pupils succeed.

Governance of the school

- Governance is very strong.
- The chair of the board of directors has been, and continues to be, highly dedicated to making sure that the school strives for excellence. He has an excellent overview of the school's work and has gone out of his way to learn about what Calthorpe pupils need.
- The other directors and members are equally effective. Between them, they have used their professional skills and expertise to provide continual challenge and support to

leaders. In meetings, they ask pertinent questions that really probe leaders' decision-making, which in turn helps to shape their actions.

- The board has rightly placed a strong emphasis on safeguarding and the member who leads on this aspect has paid careful attention to making sure that safeguarding is effective.
- There is currently no parent on the board, and board members and directors are working hard to try to ensure that they can enlist a parent as soon as possible.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding is at the heart of the school's work. Staff believe strongly that they are all responsible for keeping pupils safe. They know the complex needs of the pupils very well. Staff are vigilant to any changes in behaviour that might indicate a concern. They are skilful in helping pupils to communicate how they are feeling and what is worrying them.
- Leaders have systematically tackled the longstanding weaknesses in safeguarding. All current actions taken that relate to safeguarding are robust and appropriate. Recruitment processes are strong. Training is relevant and clearly recorded. The vice-principal who is in charge of safeguarding has a very good overview of open child protection cases and a detailed knowledge of actions that have been, and need to be, taken. The team of designated safeguarding leads is well supported by senior leaders and in turn gives good support to staff.
- Staff are clear that they can take any concerns to leaders and that these concerns will be dealt with. Staff are also confident that they could challenge leaders at any time if they felt that the right actions had not been taken.
- Leaders and staff have a good knowledge of current national issues such as radicalisation and extremism, misuse of the internet, sexting and female genital mutilation and of how these issues could affect their vulnerable pupils.
- Leaders keep a close eye on the welfare of pupils who are educated full time at Waverley School and have constant communication with the Calthorpe staff who are based there and with Waverley's leaders as necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is carefully focused on developing the skills that pupils need the most. Through the new curriculum, teachers are becoming expert at teaching these skills in an interesting and relevant way. For example, during the inspection, pupils who have complex needs were seen learning to roll over on the floor independently and to focus on an object, during an exciting drumming lesson. Autistic pupils were learning how to copy an adult's physical movements, working towards imitating sounds in order to start to speak.
- Teaching is carefully planned to ensure that pupils generalise the skills they learn into real-life situations. For example, learning about money in the classroom may then lead

to a visit to the sixth form café to 'buy' a drink, then to going to a café in the community.

- The youngest pupils are very skilfully taught. A behaviour analyst supports staff with the youngest pupils, providing a range of excellent training and development opportunities so that they can improve their skills in analysing pupils' behaviour and learning. Consequently, staff have a deeper understanding of pupils' behaviour, development and needs and use this understanding to plan learning activities very effectively. Pupils are making rapid progress as a result.
- For the pupils who have complex needs, teaching and therapies have been carefully integrated. Physiotherapists and occupational therapists have advised teachers on how best to position pupils to learn, and on how to enable pupils to practise their physical skills alongside other learning. Specialist resources are used to aid learning. This approach is working well and staff have good plans to develop this integrated work further.
- Staff use signing systems alongside spoken language to support the ongoing development of pupils' communication. Staff use symbol systems well to support autistic pupils to make their needs and feelings known and to help them to understand their day. This, in turn, leads to pupils being calm and ready to learn. The most able pupils are helped to develop their spoken language further by teachers' effective use of questioning in lessons.
- Many staff are good at giving pupils the time they need to try something for themselves, or to think about their response. Where staff take this patient approach, pupils' independence and thinking develop well. Occasionally, staff still step in too soon, focused on completion of a task rather than real learning.
- Leaders and staff are implementing new approaches to assessment to evaluate what pupils are learning through the new curriculum. Staff are becoming more confident in capturing the small steps that pupils make, for example in their physical development or their communication skills. The assessment information is comprehensively tracked and analysed and used to intervene quickly when pupils are not making the progress they might.
- The most able pupils make good progress in learning to read and write. Some staff are skilled in teaching reading. Others are not confident in using phonic strategies, so make errors or are inconsistent in how they sound out a word. Pupils have more opportunities to write at length than they have done in the past, but still not enough. When they are given opportunities to write, they tend to do so enthusiastically. As the school develops its approaches to writing, teachers are discovering that pupils are capable of more than they previously realised.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils who have a variety of different needs are systematically taught how to stay safe and how to interact with adults and those of the same age. Social behaviours are

developed well. For example, pupils, especially the older ones, know how to greet visitors to the school with a polite handshake and to introduce themselves, and they take pride in doing so.

- The school carefully and appropriately teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe. Working with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, they have developed and introduced a new sex and relationships education programme, which is carefully tailored to the needs of pupils who have severe learning difficulties.
- The school has a good awareness of pupils' mental health. Pupils are helped to maintain good mental health through exercise where possible, and through positive social interaction with friends and adults. More music, dance and movement for pupils of all abilities have been introduced to promote relaxation and enjoyment.
- Pupils who have the most complex physical and medical needs are kept safe in their classes and at break and lunchtimes. Importantly, many of these pupils have times when they socialise with their more mobile and vocal peers in other classes, depending on their needs. This helps all pupils' social development and their enjoyment of school. Leaders have good plans to develop this social integration further, in time.
- An innovative approach to assemblies has enabled autistic pupils to come together happily in the hall to spend time with each other, which is a huge move forward for many of these pupils. During the inspection, the theme of the assembly was 'winter'. Pupils from several classes were dancing and moving together, enjoying lights and paper 'snowflakes' and interacting with staff. This was a joyous and celebratory occasion.
- Through the 'community engagement' part of the curriculum, pupils of all ages go into the local community to various locations, to develop their skills and independence. Leaders have identified that this work is starting to have a good impact and are determined to develop this further.
- Bullying is not an issue. When pupils interact, they usually treat each other with kindness. High levels of staffing mean that supervision is high at all times, including at break and lunchtimes, so any problems that may arise are instantly dealt with.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- At the start of the day, pupils are greeted warmly. Staff ask how pupils are feeling and ask each other how pupils have been on the bus. Pupils come into school willingly. Because routines are clear and consistent, pupils know what to expect. They can therefore anticipate what is coming next, which helps them to feel secure and able to learn.
- The use of physical interventions has reduced enormously over the last year and is now infrequent. Other incidents of concerning behaviour have also become far less frequent. Staff use their skills and knowledge of communication and behaviour to support pupils in a quick and thoughtful way, helping pupils to express their needs and feelings in a more acceptable way.
- The majority of pupils use their communication strategies well to express what they want or need.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. Pupils work hard to develop their skills, often showing great resilience. Those who find it difficult to settle and to concentrate make good progress, responding to well-designed routines and extending the time for which they can work.
- Many of the older, more-able pupils develop mature attitudes to learning that stand them in good stead when they move into the sixth form.
- Pupils behave well at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Pupils who are able to collect their lunch independently queue sensibly and choose what they want to eat. They tidy up after lunch, usually taking their trays and cutlery to the right place without being asked. Outside, pupils choose what they want to do and cooperate well with each other.
- Leaders use fixed-term exclusions only on rare occasions, and only for a very short period of time.
- Pupils' current attendance is at a similar level to that seen in 2016/17. While attendance remains below national levels, the genuine reasons for the low attendance and persistent absence of some pupils are related to their complex health needs. Leaders ensure that staff follow up poor attendance with rigour. The importance of good attendance is promoted regularly through school newsletters and home-school diaries.
- Pupils who are based at Waverley School attend well and make good progress with their behaviour, social skills and confidence.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Across the school, pupils of all ages and who have different needs are making good progress. There is no difference in the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Boys and girls do equally well. Pupils who are looked after make good progress.
- The youngest pupils are making rapid progress with very relevant skills. For example, many pupils, including those who only joined the school in September, are learning how to use the toilet independently. Many are learning to eat independently or with minimal help and to dress themselves. All are learning to work and play together, cooperate in a group and to communicate though speaking, signing or using symbols.
- Pupils of all ages and who have different needs use their individualised communication systems very well to express their needs and make requests. Staff make sure that systems are matched well to pupils' communication skills. Some pupils learn to exchange objects, pictures or symbols, appropriate to their stage of development, or use eye-gaze technology to make choices.
- In the classes for pupils with autism, physical imitation is used to build up to verbal imitation, which means that some pupils are beginning to speak for the first time.
- The majority of the most able pupils make good progress with their reading and writing skills over time.
- Many pupils are making significant progress through the 'community engagement' work. Staff's patient yet confident approach to this work has enabled, for example,

pupils who have never been out of school to go to local shops, others to get on buses with staff and others to eat out at cafes. This significant personal progress has, in turn, had a positive impact on pupils' family lives.

- Parents' and carers' feedback on the progress that their children are making, for example through the home-school diaries, is very positive.
- Pupils who are based at Waverley School make good academic, personal and social progress over time. All current pupils are on track to attain several relevant qualifications by the end of Year 11, and some before.

Early years provision

Good

- Only a very small number of children of Nursery and Reception age join the school each year. These children join the main class for the youngest pupils, or a specialist class for autistic pupils, depending on their individual needs.
- Wherever they are placed, children are well taught and well cared for and develop their behaviour and communication skills well.
- Leadership of the primary and autism departments (to which these pupils belong) is outstanding.
- The welfare requirements are fully met in each of these classes. The provision and outcomes for these children are reported more fully above.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- In line with the leadership of the rest of the school, leadership of the sixth form is outstanding. The sixth-form leader and the assistant headteacher who oversees the sixth form are committed to making sure that all students are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment and training. 'Skills for life' pathways are wellmatched to each student's needs, focusing on developing skills for employment, participation in the community, good health and independent or supported living.
- Leaders are driven in their desire to provide the best possible learning experiences for the students, in a way that is appropriate to their needs and abilities, and that prepares them well for their life beyond school.
- The new sixth-form building provides good-quality facilities that support an age-appropriate curriculum. Importantly, sixth-form-age students who have complex needs learn in the new building along with their peers, rather than being located separately. The oldest autistic students increasingly spend time in the sixth-form centre too. During the inspection, they were in the café for one of their lessons, preparing snacks and eating and drinking together.
- The new curriculum is highly relevant and engaging. It makes good use of staff's skills. Students benefit from an increasingly creative approach to developing their skills and knowledge, for example in horticulture, woodwork, graphic design and beauty therapy. Teaching places a strong emphasis on 'real-life' work. For example, in one lesson,

students were producing high-quality Christmas cards and Christmas products such as candleholders and wreaths for sale at the school fayre. Students cook 'ready meals' that staff order to take home, and provide a paid valet service for staff and visitors' cars.

- English and mathematics skills are developed appropriately through the vocational curriculum.
- Due to the commitment and tenacity of staff in pursuing appropriate vocational experiences, a number of students engage in part-time paid employment. During the inspection, several students were heading out to their jobs. They were smartly dressed, highly motivated, clearly proud and able to explain the work they are doing and the skills they need to do it.
- Some pupils are able to develop their vocational skills in the sixth form's Orange Leaf Café, preparing and serving food for their peers in a professional catering facility, where students and staff eat together at lunchtime. Students on work placements take huge pride in spending the day as one of the chefs, working alongside a professional chef who is highly skilled at getting the best from the students. They make excellent progress, quickly learning routines, managing without prompts, preparing and serving food and clearing the kitchen after service. Their pride in their considerable achievements is immense.
- At lunchtimes, students who are able to do so, serve themselves with hot drinks, using safe equipment, clear away after eating and sit together sociably in an appropriately adult environment.
- Students, alongside their parents and carers, receive good advice and guidance about selecting meaningful destinations post-school. Staff make sure that further education, training or employment opportunities are well suited to pupils' needs and skilfully support students to make the transition. The school keeps careful records of students' success in their placements post-school. These show that students complete their training and education successfully.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 141252 |
| Local authority | Birmingham |
| Inspection number | 10030995 |

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 373 |
| Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes | 75 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Stewart Sherman |
| Principal | Richard Chapman |
| Telephone number | 0121 773 4637 |
| Website | www.calthorpe.bham.sch.uk |
| Email address | enquiry@calthorpe.bham.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 27– 28 April 2016 |

Information about this school

- Calthorpe is a very large special school in the centre of Birmingham, which caters for pupils who have severe and profound multiple learning difficulties (which the school refers to as 'complex needs') and those with autistic spectrum disorder. Numbers on roll have grown considerably in recent years. Around 300 staff members are employed at the school.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Calthorpe converted to become an academy in 2014. The principal took up his post at the beginning of January 2016.
- When the school was inspected in April 2016, it was judged to require special measures. Since then, it has received three monitoring inspections, including this inspection.
- Approximately 60% of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium. The school always has a number of children looked after on roll. Almost three quarters of the pupils are boys.
- The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. A large percentage of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Many pupils do not live in the immediate locality. The vast majority of pupils are transported to and from school by minibus. Approximately 50 minibuses arrive at school each morning and collect pupils in the afternoon.
- A small group of secondary-aged pupils is based permanently at Waverley School, a local secondary school, along with three members of staff who are employed by Calthorpe.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was the third monitoring inspection for the school since it was found to require special measures in April 2016.
- Inspectors visited classrooms and vocational areas in all areas of the school to observe learning and to talk to pupils and staff. Almost all of these visits were carried out alongside senior leaders, who talked to inspectors about the developments since the previous inspections. Inspectors looked at pupils' work both in the classroom and as a separate activity.
- Inspectors observed lunchtimes in the dining rooms, classrooms where pupils were eating, enrichment clubs and the playgrounds.
- A wide range of documents was scrutinised, including documents relating to safeguarding, teaching and learning, assessment and achievement.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, leaders of departments, staff and the board of directors.
- There were no responses to Parent View. Inspectors took account of the school's own evidence of parents' views of the school.

Inspection team

Sue Morris-King, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Deb Jenkins

Her Majesty's Inspector

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