

Inspection of an outstanding school: TreeHouse School

Woodside Avenue, Muswell Hill, London N10 3JA

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 March 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at TreeHouse School and are kept safe. This is because staff are passionate about advocating and caring for their pupils. They enable pupils to communicate using a range of tools, including signs, symbols, vocabulary boards and visual timetables. They know pupils well and are alert to their needs and changes in mood.

Pupils follow a broad curriculum. This has been carefully considered to support pupils to develop greater independence. Leaders have high expectations for pupils from their individual starting points. Together with staff, they place a consistent focus on developing pupils' communication skills. This is embedded through a rich variety of subjects and wider development opportunities.

Beyond communication and numeracy, pupils enjoy studying a range of interesting subjects, such as music, art, drama, food preparation and forestry school. While the curriculum is broad, pupils' learning has not been sufficiently well sequenced in some areas. Where this is the case, pupils find it harder to develop knowledge cumulatively and remember it in the long term.

Leaders have ensured that the school is well resourced to meet pupils' additional needs. For example, pupils have access to a range of sensory rooms and equipment. Staff use these resources effectively to help pupils regulate their emotions and behaviour. The safe outside space, which features sensory gardens and equipment, is also used to support pupils' health and well-being.

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

Leaders have designed ambitious curriculum aims that develop pupils' communication and social interaction skills sequentially. Pupils' needs and starting points are quickly identified. The school's multidisciplinary team works closely with teachers to ensure that the delivery of curriculum is adapted to support pupils to achieve the targets in their individual education, health and care (EHC) plans. For example, occupational therapists work with the physical education (PE) teachers to incorporate specific exercises for pupils. In most cases, activities are well chosen to match the intended curriculum goals. Typically, staff select tasks and resources that build on pupils' interests and experiences, as well as promote their well-being and independence.

Many subjects are well sequenced so that pupils learn the knowledge they need in small steps over time. This helps pupils to secure their understanding before tackling more complex ideas. For example, in art, pupils practise sculpting different shapes and letters using plasticine. This knowledge is used by sixth-form students to create more complex structures using clay. Similarly, in English, pupils are encouraged to speak in three-part sentences. Once this is secure, they incorporate adjectives and adverbs to make the sentences more complex.

However, in some subjects, the important ideas that pupils need to learn have not been broken down into well-sequenced steps. In these instances, teachers do not sufficiently focus on ensuring that pupils develop their understanding cumulatively. As a result, pupils sometimes struggle to understand and remember important ideas in these curriculum areas.

Teachers use a range of approaches to support pupils to engage with learning. For example, images and apparatus are used to reinforce pupils' understanding of number, pattern and shape in mathematics. Similarly, sensory techniques such as writing in sand trays, gestures and song are used to reinforce learning of new vocabulary in English. Adults ensure that pupils know what to expect through structured teaching approaches and visual timetables. This reduces pupils' anxiety because they know what is expected of them. Staff use a range of checks to see what pupils are learning and typically correct mistakes straightaway. However, occasionally, pupils are moved on to more complex ideas before they have secured the knowledge they need to understand them.

Leaders have adopted a sensory-based phonics programme for teaching reading and communication. Staff are well trained to deliver this programme with precision. Pupils practise their phonics daily. This supports them to become more proficient readers. Pupils learn a range of vocabulary through regular reading sessions in different curriculum areas. For example, in the sixth form, students read menus and ingredient lists as part of food preparation.

Although the needs of pupils mean many struggle with behaviour and attention, a renewed focus on autonomy and choice means behaviour is improving. Staff are very well trained to de-escalate challenging behaviour and help pupils to feel calm and regulate their emotions.

Pupils' wider development is well considered. Their education is enriched through a planned programme of experiences, including residential visits and outings. For example, pupils visit local parks and galleries, as well as football clubs. Pupils learn to celebrate different cultures and develop an appreciation for nature and music. They are taught how to look after themselves and respect others. Through this, they are well prepared for their life after school. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, also receive advice and guidance on planning their future careers. For example, leaders organise focused careers weeks and organise for pupils to attend work experience.

Staff are proud of the work they do to support pupils. They feel well supported by leaders, who are considerate of their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff receive regular training. This ensures that they understand safeguarding in the context of working in this school. Staff recognise indications that a pupil may be at risk and know how to report any such concerns. A specialist programme is in place to ensure that pupils with communication difficulties are supported to express any concerns they may have.

Leaders have robust systems to manage and monitor pupils at risk. Leaders work closely with the local authority to ensure that pupils and their families receive timely and suitable support.

The curriculum has been designed to help pupils learn about staying healthy and safe. For example, highly trained staff communicate important messages about healthy and respectful relationships.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the knowledge that pupils need to understand and remember has not been broken down into well-sequenced steps. In these instances, teachers do not sufficiently focus on ensuring that pupils develop their understanding cumulatively. As a result, pupils struggle to understand important ideas in these areas. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum is cumulatively sequenced so that teachers focus on helping pupils to understand, embed and remember key knowledge in the long term.

Background

When we have judged outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 school to be outstanding in October 2012.

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](#)' 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	135534
Local authority	Haringey
Inspection number	10255544
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Neil Goulden
Headteacher	Joanna Dziopa
Website	http://www.treehouseschool.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school's current headteacher took up post in January 2022.
- The school caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is part of the Ambitious about Autism Trust.
- Leaders do not make use of alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including reading and communication, mathematics and PE. To do this, they met with subject leaders, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects as part of the inspection.
- The inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement.
- The inspectors met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers, and support staff.
- The inspectors met with those responsible for governance, including the chair of governors, and spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising records and through discussions with staff and pupils.
- The views of pupils, parents and staff were considered through discussions and looking at information collected from Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Una Buckley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hook

Ofsted Inspector

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