

Inspection of an outstanding school: Thriftwood School

Slades Lane, Galleywood, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 8RW

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 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?

Thriftwood School is a happy, friendly and welcoming place. Pupils on both sites enjoy coming to school and spending time with their friends. They like learning about and trying new things. Pupils regularly go out and about in the community. They learn and practise key skills, such as crossing the road or using public transport safely, that will help them as they move towards adulthood.

Pupils behave extremely well. They are polite and well mannered. Pupils learn the rules, known as 'The Thriftwood Code', very well and most pupils follow them all the time. Pupils get on very well together. Problems such as bullying do not happen very often. Incidents are sorted out quickly when they do occur.

Pupils try hard with their learning. They know that leaders and staff want them to do well. Pupils achieve a lot during their time at the school. Pupils gain useful qualifications that help them to be able to go on to college courses when they leave the school.

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

Leaders have ensured that a suitably ambitious curriculum is in place. Subjects are planned so that pupils learn new skills and knowledge step by step in an appropriate order. Leaders' recent focus has been on developing the continuity of the curriculum from the school site onto the college site. As a result, the curriculum is increasingly 'joined up' so that pupils' learning develops smoothly, from the time they join the school until they leave the college.

Staff think very carefully about how best to present new learning to pupils. They typically match their approach to pupils' needs well. Teachers constantly check how well pupils have understood and remembered new learning. They provide lots of opportunities for

pupils to practise things over and over again so that they remember them in the longer term.

Although a small number, an increasing proportion of pupils have severe learning disabilities. Class teachers skilfully plan the learning for the pupils in their class. However, long-term curriculum plans for this group of pupils are not fully in place. The intended learning journey as pupils move through the school has not been completely mapped out. The small steps of progress that leaders intend pupils to make have not been fully identified. As a result, the curriculum for this group of pupils is not as strong as it is for the rest of the school.

Pupils achieve well overall, and some pupils achieve particularly well. For example, in English, the oldest pupils remember language features, such as similes and sibilance, and use them accurately in class discussions. They show interest in, and knowledge of, literary works such as poems by Dylan Thomas. This illustrates the very strong progress some pupils make from their starting points.

Most pupils can read competently. Pupils' views of reading are mixed, with some having been 'switched off' by their early experiences of learning to read in other settings. Some pupils love reading and happily name books and authors they enjoy. Staff successfully use a range of strategies to encourage pupils to develop a love of reading.

A small proportion of pupils throughout the school are at an early stage of learning to read. Leaders have ensured that a validated systematic synthetic phonics programme is in place on the school site. They have also introduced a phonics programme designed for older teenagers and adults on the college site. In many cases, these programmes are used well and pupils make strong progress. In a small number of cases, the phonics programme is not matched closely enough to pupils' needs and their existing knowledge. This limits the progress that pupils make.

Pupils typically have very strong attitudes to learning. They are keen to learn and they do their best. Pupils' behaviour is often exemplary. They listen carefully to their teachers and follow The Thriftwood Code at all times.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum has a clear focus on helping pupils learn to play an active role in society and their communities. Pupils are taught to think about other people. They are considerate and support each other. The school's 'fundamentals for the future' curriculum focuses on steadily preparing pupils for adulthood, throughout their time at the school. Pupils typically move on to college places, and occasionally to apprenticeships, when they leave the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and ongoing updates throughout the year. As a result, staff know the school's procedures

and practices well. They are alert and vigilant, noticing small changes, for example in pupils' appearance or behaviour. Staff report their concerns promptly.

The designated safeguarding leads take appropriate and timely action in response to concerns. Leaders have ensured that very strong processes are in place to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with pupils.

The PSHE curriculum teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is variation in how effectively phonics is taught. Where it is less effective, the programme is not sufficiently well matched to pupils' individual needs and their existing knowledge of phonics. Where this is the case, pupils make less progress than they could. Leaders should take action to ensure that, where pupils are at an early stage of learning to read, phonics is taught highly effectively.
- The curriculum for pupils with severe learning disabilities is not fully developed. Teachers are building the curriculum, bit by bit, as pupils move through the school. This means that the learning journey for this group of pupils is not fully mapped out. Leaders should continue to develop the curriculum for pupils with severe learning disabilities so that it is coherently planned and sequenced in the longer term.

Background

When we have judged a 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 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in September 2017.

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	137554
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10255259
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	262
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	62
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sally Lockyer
Headteacher	Georgina Pryke
Website	www.thriftwoodschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 September 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Thriftwood School operates on two sites. Pupils in key stages 2 and 3 are based at the main school site. Pupils in key stages 4 and 5 are based at a second site. This is known as Thriftwood College and its address is: Fox Crescent, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2BN.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have moderate learning disabilities. A small proportion of pupils have severe learning disabilities, and some pupils have autism.
- The headteacher took up her current post as executive headteacher across both the school and college sites in September 2021. The head of the college took up her post in January 2022. The head of the school site took up her post at the beginning of the summer term 2023.
- Although the school is registered for pupils from the age of five years, it currently has no key stage 1 pupils. This has been the case for several years.

- The school uses six unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the head of the school site and the head of the college site, other leaders, groups of staff, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust and the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, PSHE, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also listened to pupils reading, scrutinised a range of school documents and observed pupils during breaktime.
- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at records of child protection concerns and spoke with leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 41 responses to Ofsted Parent View and 29 free-text comments. They also took account of 81 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Suzanne Thrower

Ofsted Inspector

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