

Treetops School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115454
Local Authority	THURROCK
Inspection number	290231
Inspection dates	19–20 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	183
6th form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Peaford
Headteacher	Mr Paul Smith
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001
School address	Dell Road Grays Essex RM17 5LH
Telephone number	01375 372723
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Age group	2–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Treetops is a larger than average special school for pupils aged 2 to 18 with a wide variety of learning needs. The largest group are those with moderate difficulties but there are also significant numbers with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), speech and language difficulties and social and emotional and behavioural needs. Boys outnumber girls by over four to one. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds, with a small number from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. The school is to move into a new purpose built site by 2008. Currently, it is somewhat overcrowded, necessitating its Early Intervention Centre (EIC) for the youngest pupils and those with more complex ASD to be based on another site four miles away. A new sixth form provision opened in September 2006. The school provides a resource centre, a Portage service, and outreach and training services to mainstream schools.

Because of the nature of pupils' learning difficulties, when they enter the school, their skills, knowledge and understanding are at a low level compared with most children of a similar age. A small number of pupils, particularly those in the EIC, attend mainstream schools for part of the week or have individual inclusion opportunities in nearby schools. The school and its teachers have received many awards, including Investors in People and Healthy Schools Award, and it is currently seeking specialist schools status.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school, highly effective in almost every element of its work. It is a place which families say 'has transformed the lives of both our children and ourselves'. It is led and managed extremely well and provides excellent value for money. The focus on pupils and their well-being is reflected in all aspects of the school's work, including the excellent relationships formed with pupils, families and many community partners. Together they create a genuine 'team around the child', determined to help every pupil to achieve their potential. The school is highly focussed on its vision of being a centre for excellence, supporting not only the pupils within the school to the highest achievement, but also enabling other schools to deliver similarly high achievements through its high quality outreach services. The outstanding leadership of the headteacher and senior team and the excellent support from the governing body have led to the school developing innovative approaches to meet pupils' needs, and prioritising staff's professional development to secure 'best practice' for its pupils. The school is at the forefront of many local initiatives and indeed those further afield. Since its last inspection it has gone from strength to strength, addressing all issues very well, and it has excellent capacity to achieve even more.

The school provides extremely well for pupils' independence, self-esteem, social and communication skills and their right to choices and opportunities. As a result, personal development is excellent. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and behave excellently. The school is particularly effective in engendering a sense of community, of responsibility for self and others and of mutual respect. Older pupils provide excellent role models for younger ones, helping in their learning and in their play. Pupils know how to look after themselves and understand the importance of a healthy life style. They are extremely well prepared for the next stages of their education and beyond through their high level of personal and academic achievement, careers programmes, work experience and transition arrangements. Parents know the school will 'go the extra mile' in helping them to understand their child's needs, manage their behaviour and support their learning. As a result, learning extends very well indeed into the home and the community.

Pupils' achievements are excellent, because of the highly effective teaching and the opportunities teachers provide for pupils to apply their skills in meaningful ways. The effective curriculum includes a rich range of experiences which contribute very well to pupils' learning. Excellent assemblies, planned opportunities for reflection and wide ranging cultural opportunities support pupils' understanding of their place in a wider world. Additional activities after school are particularly good and highly valued by families and pupils. Brothers and sisters also often attend. The approach used in the EIC is intensively taught, with passion and commitment, by skilled instructors and teachers. It is highly effective in meeting children's social, communicative and behavioural needs. However these pupils do not always have sufficient opportunity to study the elements of the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum that they should.

This is a school with a determination to 'be the best'. It is challenged and supported extremely well by the excellent governing body. The school tracks pupils' progress particularly well and is continually challenging itself to do better. For example, although it monitors its achievements well, it is seeking ways of analysing and comparing the data it has even more effectively to check on the progress of specific groups of pupils more rigorously.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

An excellent start has been made in providing for the needs of post-16 students in helping them to work and plan for their own future. Although the post-16 provision is very new, its effectiveness is already good. The excellent leadership of the head of the sixth form has resulted in a well conceived curriculum which is highly responsive to individual student's learning needs. Firm links have already been established with local colleges to provide a range of vocational and academic courses for students to choose from. A rich range of experiences prepares students very well for the future, supports essential communication skills and skills for adult and working life, and gives them the confidence to participate actively as citizens in school and in the broader community. For example, they help younger pupils learn, and take part in mini-enterprise activities to raise money for a local charity. Students achieve well as a result of good teaching and work towards a good range of qualifications, highly appropriate to their needs. They benefit academically and socially from the time they spend at college, and make good progress in acquiring basic skills. Students' personal development is outstanding. They are very well cared for and have excellent relationships with one another and with staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that programmes taught by the EIC take due account of the Foundation Stage and National Curriculum, that planning reflects this and pupils have access to all the subjects that they should.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Although for most pupils their attainment remains significantly below others of a similar age, pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points. Almost all make extremely good progress in English, mathematics, science and personal development and this is reflected in their very high levels of achievement and confidence when they leave the school. All achieve entry level and other qualifications in a number of subjects and many attain passes in GCSE in mathematics and art. Careful groupings of pupils and analysis of their performance ensure that all are challenged by their individual targets and their lessons, and that older pupils have access to appropriate accredited courses. Pupils achieve so well because of the high expectations of staff and the very good team work with teaching assistants, instructors and therapists. This means that pupils learn skills and strategies for approaching their work as well as being motivated strongly by the interesting content. The highly focussed teaching and therapeutic approach in the EIC supports pupils' involvement in their learning very well, but some have limited opportunities to apply these skills more generally in other subjects. The majority of these pupils are supported very well towards a full-time place in mainstream or at Treetops itself. The school ensures everyone leaves with qualifications that help them to move forward towards a new course or job. It also makes them feel good about themselves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

This is excellent and a great strength of the school and sixth form. Pupils are extremely responsive in lessons and increasingly take responsibility for their learning and behaviour. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and central to the school's ethos. Opportunities for spiritual development are numerous, supporting extremely well pupils' self-esteem and growing awareness of others' needs. Pupils have a very clear understanding of right and wrong, are developing a social conscience, take part in a number of community activities and make many positive contributions to the school and local community. This is a racially harmonious school. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are completely integrated and cultural diversity is celebrated in festivals and curriculum activities.

Attendance is good and behaviour is excellent. Pupils learn to manage their own behaviour through just the right type of support and respectful management. They report that they feel safe and 'at home': they were sometimes very unhappy in their previous schools. They report occasional bullying, particularly on the minibuses to and from school, but know that the school tries hard to deal with this. Through their lessons and extra-curricular activities they are developing an excellent awareness of making healthy choices and of how their actions can make a difference to themselves and to the world.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

This is a highly skilled staff. They and the pupils benefit hugely from the emphasis the school places on training. As a result, teaching and learning are excellent in the main school and good in the sixth form. Pupils learn extremely well because lessons are lively and interesting and staff use a range of different ways, including information and communication technology (ICT), to help them understand and achieve.

Teaching assistants and instructors are deployed particularly well so that pupils have just the right amount of help to help them succeed but are expected to think and learn for themselves. Staff know the pupils' needs very well indeed and almost all teachers use this information to plan different work for particular groups and individual pupils. This is highly effective, enabling children to work increasingly independently and to recognise and celebrate their own learning. The school is rightly proud of its success in supporting the learning of pupils with ASD, whether in the mainstream or the EIC. Careful targeting of programmes and detailed assessment of learning ensures that these pupils are engaged more in their learning, improving their cooperation, understanding and communication significantly.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum in the main school and sixth form provides pupils with a good range of opportunities to learn and teaches all the subjects it should. Careful planning ensures activities within subjects are broken down into small, achievable steps. A very well planned and implemented programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) supports pupils' personal development very well indeed. The very good provision for literacy and numeracy includes a rich range of highly enjoyable activities in different subjects, fully engages pupils and spurs them on to the highest achievement.

A very good range of award bearing courses is in place, including Youth Awards, entry level courses and GCSEs. An excellent range of additional activities, such as dance, sports and art clubs, visits and residential trips enhances pupils' learning, enjoyment and achievement further. The developing sixth form curriculum is already good. Good college links increase students' options and choices. The good range of vocational courses adapted to each student's needs ensures that they have the opportunity to prepare very effectively for adult life, for employment and to participate as active members of their community.

The curriculum followed in the EIC is highly effective in improving pupils' social communication and interaction skills. However, there are limited opportunities for these pupils to learn all the National Curriculum and Foundation Stage subjects they should.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

A particular strength is the very high level of personal care and support offered to all pupils. The environment is safe and supportive, yet enabling and empowering, with an emphasis on personal development and success. Pupils are given excellent support and guidance to learn through the high quality teaching and support for learning and behaviour. This results in excellent personal development and academic achievement and pupils who genuinely care about each other and staff. Recently, the school has begun to involve pupils in target setting and self-evaluation more. This is going well and is helping pupils to take even more responsibility for their own learning and independence.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. All required checks on staff are carried out, but are only just in the process of being merged into a single central record as is now required. Child protection procedures are very strong but procedures for health and safety and risk assessments are under review because they need updating.

The excellent, close working relationships with therapists and medical staff result in pupils being extremely well cared for and any additional needs being met very well. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and staff. Very good support is offered to families and to vulnerable pupils. The school's Portage and ASD outreach services are effective and very well received and sought after.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The leadership of the chair of governors, headteacher and senior team, and the vision they share for the school and its services, are outstanding. This is a school that is highly ambitious for all of its pupils and reflects carefully on its work and how it could do even better. Pupils' achievements are monitored and evaluated carefully. The leadership and the whole staff team know the school's strengths and areas for improvement very well, recognising, for example, that they could go even further in analysing the achievements of groups of pupils or in making comparisons with other schools.

High expectations underpin everything that the school does. The leadership is careful to ensure each child has access to the resources that they need, for example buying in extra speech and language therapy and identifying inclusion opportunities.

They listen hard to the views of families, other partners and pupils, working exceptionally well with them so that pupils' progress is maximised. Subject leaders are now actively involved in monitoring their subjects and are equally committed to raising achievement further. The highly effective and supportive governing body keeps an ever watchful eye on standards, resources, the school achievements and the well-being of pupils. They are very informed about the school's work and are strong advocates for it, campaigning vigorously with the headteacher for the new school, for example.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 March 2007

Dear Pupils

Treetops School and Centre of Excellence, Dell Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 5LH

Thank you so much for welcoming me and the other two inspectors into the school recently. Thank you for talking with us and allowing us to look at your work and share your lessons. This really helped us to see how good your school is and how it is helping you. Of course you all told us how much you enjoyed being at Treetops and your families said so too.

We think that your school is excellent and that it really helps you to learn very well in all the subjects that you should, and to grow up into very capable and nice young people. The way that you behave and really try in your lessons is excellent. We particularly like the way you help and care for each other. You have really good teachers and other staff who are always thinking about how to make your learning interesting. This means that whichever part of the school you are in, whatever age you are, you enjoy learning and know that you are getting better at the work you do.

Mr Smith is an excellent headteacher and he and the governors are always trying to find ways of making the school even better so that everyone has a chance to do as well as they can. We have asked them to think about how the children in the Early Intervention Centre can have even more interesting things to do. We know that when you move to your new school this will be easier for staff to plan for and that you will be able to help in that too.

With best wishes and thank you again,

Sue Lewis

(Lead inspector)