

Treetops School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115454
Local Authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	338586
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	232
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alan Peaford
Headteacher	Mr Paul Smith
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2007
School address	Buxton Road Grays Essex
Telephone number	01375 372723
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They spent the majority of time in observing teaching and observed 24 lessons and eighteen teachers. Meetings were held with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation. They also looked at 84 parents' questionnaires, 121 pupils' questionnaires and 41 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the achievement and progress of all pupils from their starting point
- the quality of assessment in each part of the school
- the quality of teaching throughout the school and whether strengths and weaknesses were correctly identified by the senior managers
- measures to improve the attendance of the pupils

Information about the school

The school, which is much larger than average, provides mainly for pupils with moderate learning difficulties but also for an increasing number of pupils with autism, speech and communication difficulties and developmental delay. The majority of pupils have complex learning needs. Almost all the pupils are from White British backgrounds. The school provides a resource centre, a portage service and outreach and training to mainstream schools. Since the previous inspection the school has moved to purpose-built facilities, which are not yet finished. The school has many awards for its work and gained specialist status in Communication and Interaction in September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Treetops is an outstanding school, which has continued to improve since the previous inspection when it was also judged outstanding in almost every category. Excellent care, guidance and support ensure that children make exceptional progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Pupils feel valued because of the high quality relationships that exist at all levels. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and report that they feel safe within its welcoming and attractive environment. One parent commented, summing up the views of many, 'Treetops consistently delivers excellence at all levels'. However, despite the school's strenuous efforts to promote good attendance, a very small number of families have not been able to ensure that their children attend regularly

Since the last inspection, there has been a clear focus on accelerating pupils' progress to raise standards further. Pupils in each age group achieve exceptionally well and, by Year 11, almost all the pupils gain a range of GCSE or Entry Level qualifications. Nevertheless, senior staff are aware that improvements could be made in the ways they present data which shows pupils' academic performance. Younger children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress and this prepares them very well for joining the main school. The pupils in post-16 education continue to make outstanding progress as they build on their success through the school. As a result almost every pupil from the sixth form, over the last few years, has left to take up a college course. The school is highly inclusive and provides well for those who are vulnerable and those with additional special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils with autism and communication difficulties make exceptional progress. Their provision is exemplary and a real strength of the school.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Lessons are very well planned by knowledgeable teaching staff. They ensure that assessment information is used effectively so that lesson activities challenge all the different ability groups to make good progress. As a result the curriculum is outstanding because teachers make sure that learning is tailored to the needs of each individual. Activities are unfailingly interesting and well prepared. The pupils look forward to lessons, they enjoy their learning and this supports the excellent outcomes for all pupils.

The headteacher, governors and senior management team work tirelessly to provide clear educational direction for the school. The school's processes for monitoring its own work are extremely robust and take into account the views of staff, governors and parents. The strength of the school's self-evaluation and continuing progress made since the last inspection, including the award of specialist status, demonstrate the school's outstanding capacity to improve further.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine the procedures for presenting the pupils' achievements so that teachers and senior staff are able to demonstrate the school's outstanding effectiveness more easily.
 - Increase the percentage of attendance to above the national average by providing specific support for those few families whose children are persistently absent.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils make outstanding progress from attainment which is generally very low when they enter the school. The performance of a minority of pupils rises to just below the national average. Most pupils, for example, gain GCSE accreditation in English and mathematics as well as GCSE or Entry Level qualifications in a variety of subjects. Pupils of all ages achieve very well, particularly in literacy, numeracy and communication. Pupils receive a high level of individual support. This encourages them to attempt new work and to learn by their mistakes, confident in the positive support they receive. At the end of lessons they are keen to demonstrate what they have learned and how well this builds on what they knew beforehand. For instance, pupils in Year 8 were keen to read aloud books and told a story about themselves. They made very good progress in learning some new words and fitting them into the story. The pupils achieve very well against challenging targets which are sharply focused and matched to their starting points and ability level. Pupils with autism in the specialist classes make astounding progress. Often they enter classes with extremely limited communication and challenging behaviour. With excellent assessment practice and precise teaching they quickly learn to communicate through signs and many pupils make outstanding progress in developing speech and in learning how to communicate appropriately with others. The school provides a happy, calm haven where pupils enjoy learning. They feel well cared for by staff and state that there is no bullying or unpleasantness. Their behaviour is exemplary and they demonstrate positive attitudes to their work. Attendance of the vast majority of pupils is excellent because they enjoy school so much. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. They demonstrate growing levels of empathy, tolerance and understanding. They play happily together and support each other, they are pleased when others do well in their work and they socialise very successfully. Their cultural understanding and knowledge of their local and wider communities is very good. They wholeheartedly support initiatives to improve aspects of their life in school and the local community. All pupils gain a very good understanding of healthy lifestyles and how to keep themselves safe. Their outstanding progress in basic skills, in developing their self confidence and independence equips them very well for their transition to adult life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum is consistently well matched to each pupil's learning needs. This is achieved through very effective and perceptive continual assessment and planning which enables teachers to accurately adapt work to suit each pupil's attainment and achievement. Teachers know their pupils very well. Older pupils are carefully grouped to ensure they are stretched by their individual targets. The well-trained teaching assistants work effectively with each group, providing very good support. They have high expectations of the pupils and challenge them through the brisk pace of lessons and well-directed questions. Teachers and assistants manage behaviour very well and this results in a relaxed atmosphere and excellent relationships. The pupils with autism in the 'verbal behaviour' (VB) classes work on specifically designed programmes and receive skilled individual tuition and support from highly trained teachers and other staff. The curriculum places a strong emphasis on basic skills while retaining an appropriate breadth and balance. There are excellent opportunities for older pupils to learn vocational skills through community and work experience. There is an extensive range of activities to enhance pupils' learning including flourishing after-school clubs. For instance there is a well supported 'Song Club' which performs regularly at community functions, the most popular being singing at a local residential home for elderly people. There is an effective programme of personal, health and social education which has a strong impact on the pupils' personal skills. An extremely caring ethos results in very

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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happy children and pupils, who thoroughly enjoy school life. The school works exceptionally well with a range of external support agencies. As a result, vulnerable children receive excellent support, which enables them to get the best out of their learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's leaders have continued to drive up the already high quality of teaching and pupils' achievements since the previous inspection. A strength of the school lies in the rigorous and effective way managers monitor, evaluate and improve on every aspect of the school's performance. This leads to the raising of standards through sharply focused school improvement planning. Governors are involved in all aspects of school life and provide outstanding challenge and support to the school. There are very effective procedures to measure pupils' progress although the senior team are aware that there is scope to refine these procedures to enable them to demonstrate the school's effectiveness more easily. Communication is excellent. Staff feel fully consulted, involved and valued and consequently, there is a clear common purpose that permeates the life of the school. The quality of professional training for all staff is outstanding. This makes a significant contribution to sustaining pupils' outstanding achievement.

Child protection, risk assessment and safeguarding requirements are extremely robust and meet current statutory guidelines. The school works extremely well with outside agencies to support pupils' health, welfare, social and learning needs. The outreach programme for local schools is very successful and highly regarded. Staff also work very effectively with parents to engage them in their children's learning. The school makes a very good contribution to community cohesion. It promotes cohesion well within its own community and engages with a wide variety of local partners. Pupils across the school are aware of international events through discussion of the news in registration periods. In one Year 7 lesson for example, pupils researched the internet and engaged in informed discussion with their teacher about the recent Chilean earthquake. They develop a strong sense of the diversity and multi-culturalism of society by celebrating and learning about the festivals of different faiths. The school has a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. It is outstandingly successful in removing barriers to learning for pupils, including those with additional learning needs, and thus improving their life chances.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Children greatly enjoy being in the nursery and reception class. They come in with big smiles. They find the activities exciting and interesting and this motivates them to achieve well and make outstanding progress. There is a good balance between adult-led activities and those chosen by the children. Teachers' planning is excellent and underpinned by a very high standard of assessment of children's progress. Teaching is securely founded on a very good knowledge of how children learn and progress. Adults provide excellent support for children, especially in helping them develop their personal, social and communication skills, and consistently give the highest priority to safeguarding them. Relationships are excellent with children and parents. This enables parents to give good support to their children at home. The provision is very well led and managed. The children's well being and progress is helped significantly through the exceptional organisation and planning for continual improvement.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account: Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

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Sixth form

Students benefit from well designed personalised programmes, geared to their interests and ability. They are involved in an extensive range of activities outside school, which have a substantial impact on their personal skills and self-confidence. As a result, they greatly enjoy the sixth form experience. Their behaviour and attendance is exemplary. They make excellent progress through skilled teaching. Their achievement in basic skills and vocational subjects is outstanding and results in all the students gaining accreditation in a range of basic skills and work-related qualifications. As a result of excellent transition planning, every student goes on to further education or training. They make outstanding progress in all aspects of their personal development and they mature into confident young adults, able to help plan and carry out a range of activities. This is well illustrated in the sixth form 'cafe', where the students serve bacon sandwiches and other snacks and take responsibility for a large part of the organisation. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The quality of post-16 education has risen from the good standards seen at the previous inspection to the outstanding provision and outcomes that are now prevalent.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many parents drew attention to the professionalism and dedication of the staff and how well their child has progressed since joining the school. They report that their children are happy and secure and that they have every confidence in the school's care.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Treetops School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 84 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 232 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	67	80	16	19	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	73	87	10	12	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	71	85	11	13	1	1	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	66	79	15	17	0	0	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	73	87	9	10	0	0	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	70	83	13	15	0	0	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	64	76	18	22	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	64	76	15	17	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	85	11	13	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	67	80	15	17	0	0	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	64	76	17	20	0	0	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	71	85	12	14	0	0	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	77	92	6	7	0	0	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



3 March 2010

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of Treetops School, Grays, Essex, RM16 2WU

Not long ago my colleagues and I came to your school to see how you were getting on and to suggest things to make your school even better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting with some of you in a discussion, in your classrooms and at lunchtime in the dining room and the sixth form cafe. Thank you and well done. We can see that you all enjoy school very much. We were with you for two days. That was, however, long enough for us to decide that your school is outstanding.

Here is a list of some of the things about your school that we particularly liked.

You work hard and all make excellent progress in your work and in your personal development. Your behaviour is excellent.

The many different people at the school look after you very well.

You do lots of interesting activities including those that help you to become independent, make choices and learn all about different places and customs.

All the adults work very hard to give you as much help as possible and they are very good at preparing interesting work for each of you.

Your headteacher and his senior staff run the school very well and everyone, including your parents, gives them strong support.

We think the school could improve even further if teachers were able to show your parents and visitors, (such as myself and my colleagues), even more clearly, and in greater detail, just how well you are doing. We want them to work closely with some of your families to improve your attendance.

Please thank your parents for me, for all the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Yours sincerely,

Melvyn Blackband

Lead inspector

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