

Thriftwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115472
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	357756
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Godfrey Bancroft

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann–Marie Briggs
Headteacher	Sally Davies
Date of previous school inspection	25 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 14 lessons, taught by 12 teachers. The inspectors held discussions with members of staff, pupils, parents and carers, and representatives of the governing body. They looked at a range of school policies and other documentation, including that providing information about pupils' progress. They also considered the views given in 40 parental questionnaires, 35 questionnaires submitted by pupils and 43 questionnaires returned by members of staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What actions are the school taking to promote teaching of the highest quality?
- How effectively do teaching and the curriculum support pupils in becoming increasingly independent and in preparing them for adult life and the world of work?
- What impact has the school's revised staffing structure had on outcomes for pupils?

Information about the school

Thriftwood School provides for pupils who have statements for a range of special educational needs. These needs include moderate learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties and emotional, social and communication difficulties. An increasing number of pupils joining the school have attention deficit hyperactive disorders (ADHD) and autistic syndrome disorders (ASD). The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal is broadly average. The proportion coming from ethnic minority groups is very low and there are none who speak English as an additional language. There are just over twice as many boys as girls and a small number of pupils are looked after by the local authority. The school provides a support and advice to mainstream and other special schools, and has a training centre on site. The school has the Sports Mark Award and Healthy Schools Status. It also has Fairtrade status and is a specialist school for business and enterprise.

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

Thriftwood provides an outstanding quality of education for its pupils and is highly regarded by parents and carers and by the community it serves. One parent reflected the views of many when he said: 'All the staff are approachable and supportive. We are very pleased with the nurturing approach which has resulted in our son's excellent progress. We cannot praise the school highly enough.' The school also has an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement. The headteacher, senior managers and the governing body work closely together and have made significant enhancements to provision since the school was last inspected in September 2007, when it was also judged to be outstanding. For example, in partnership with the charity Barnardo's, they have opened the Apex Centre which provides outstanding support for families who have children with special educational needs, including after-school and holiday provision. They have also introduced a revised curriculum that is highly effective in meeting the ever-changing and increasingly complex needs of pupils.

The headteacher and senior managers have revised the school's staffing structure and enhanced the procedures for evaluating the quality of provision and identifying areas for improvement. These procedures make a very effective contribution to maintaining the high quality of the provision evident in many aspects for the school's work. This includes creating excellent training opportunities for all staff, including those who work at other special schools and in mainstream schools. As a result, pupils benefit greatly from outstanding teaching. Lessons are challenging and capture pupils' interest and enthusiasm for learning. One Year 11 pupil said: 'I have been at Thriftwood since I was five and will be leaving at the end of this year. I cannot imagine attending a better school.' Teaching methods and the curriculum are constantly under review as the school explores new and innovative ways of meeting the needs of each pupil and continuing to promote their best possible progress. There is a prominent emphasis on developing pupils' communication and social skills, which the school does very successfully. At the heart of the school's work are the highly effective ways in which it enables pupils to achieve independence and prepares them for adult life and the world of work. Central to this is the exceptionally positive impact of the Business and Enterprise specialism and the excellent range of opportunities for pupils to learn out of doors.

The school is also highly effective in exploring every opportunity to address pupils' emotional and sensory needs. Resources to support this aspect of the school's work are good. However, there is no dedicated accommodation and a variety of working

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spaces are used, taking up the valuable time of staff to set them up.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Explore ways of providing a dedicated working space to further enhance the ways in which staff can promote pupils' sensory development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

All pupils start at the school with low attainment. However, they thrive and make excellent progress, achieving outstandingly well to the extent that many attain National Curriculum levels. By the time the oldest pupils are ready to leave the majority have attained accreditation at either GCSE entry level or in vocational courses, including City and Guilds. Attendance is above average and pupils' enjoyment of school and their enthusiasm for learning is very evident during lessons. Their willingness to participate in discussions reflects the school's success in developing pupils' communication skills. Pupils also make significant strides in mastering written communication skills, including becoming proficient in the use of information and communication technology. A similar picture is evident in pupils' acquisition of basic mathematical skills. The school's business and enterprise specialism has prominent profile, providing an excellent vehicle for pupils to apply their skills practically and in vocational settings. In addition to their academic development, pupils also make excellent progress in their personal, emotional and social development. Those pupils who have attention deficit hyperactive disorders and autistic syndrome disorders make outstanding progress in their sensory development.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and their behaviour during lessons, at playtimes and at the start and end of the school day is exemplary. They are very well informed about the importance of taking regular exercise and having a healthy diet. Pupils also make an exceptional contribution to the community. They are always eager to take responsibility and are able to influence decisions about the school by participation in the school council and the enterprise council. Pupils are in overall charge of the Galleywood village market and manage a range of stalls. The school's Fairtrade status is making a significant contribution to raising pupils' awareness of the challenges facing people who live in other parts of the world.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. This is evident during their participation in assemblies, their joy of music and the respect they show for each other. The older pupils provide excellent role models, to which the younger ones aspire. Pupils are rightly proud of their school and of their achievements: for example, a group of older pupils recently made a very well received business and enterprise presentation at Anglia Ruskin University.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
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?

Lessons are exciting and capture pupils’ interest and enthusiasm for learning. This is because lesson content is tailored very closely to the needs of each pupil. Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and lessons are often very challenging. However, staff are particularly careful to ensure that pupils acquire the skills they need to be successful. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent and this gives pupils the confidence to try their very best. They are also very appreciative that their efforts are recognised and celebrated. Every lesson contains a prominent focus on developing pupils’ communication and social skills, which underpins the excellent learning skills that many pupils acquire. This was particularly evident in an outstanding music lesson which capitalised on opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussion and to apply their mathematical knowledge. Similarly, a business studies lesson for the oldest pupils permitted them to apply their speaking, teamwork and organisation skills, revealing the excellent progress they have made.

Assessment procedures focus very closely on pupils’ social as well as their academic development. These procedures are used very effectively by all staff to plan the next stages of learning for each pupil. Pupils, especially the older ones, are very knowledgeable about their targets and about how to improve their work.

The curriculum is also tailored precisely to pupils’ needs and provides something in which each one can achieve successfully. For younger pupils the curriculum is flexible and can be adapted to provide focused learning opportunities, such as sensory development, music therapy and working in small groups. Older pupils have access to an excellent range of vocational courses that prepare them exceptionally well for

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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adult life and the world of work. Learning opportunities are supplemented by an outstanding range of additional activities and clubs, educational visits and visitors. The Forest Schools programme and opportunities for outdoor learning are particularly enjoyed and appreciated by pupils. During the inspection some older pupils attended a residential course afloat at an outdoor education centre. Such experiences make a significant contribution to pupils’ personal development.

Pupils benefit from exemplary care, guidance and support. Staff are very aware of the individual needs of each pupil. Pupils who are in the care of the local authority or who because of their circumstances might potential be at risk are afforded care of the highest quality. The increasing numbers of pupils who experience emotional challenges, for example high levels of anxiety, are supported exceptionally well. The school also does an excellent job in preparing pupils for the next stages of their education.

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 headteacher and senior leaders have high expectations for the school’s success and set very challenging targets for pupils’ progress and for school improvement. The evaluation of initiatives designed to bring about improvements is rigorous. In this respect the governing body does an excellent job in holding the school to account for the quality of its work. The leadership and management of teaching and learning are excellent and are based on the provision of an outstanding range of opportunities for the professional development of staff at all levels. The aim of ensuring that every pupil is able to do their best underpins every aspect of the school’s work. With this in mind, everything possible is done to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate discrimination.

The governing body is very well informed about all aspects of the school’s work. They are great advocates for the school in the community and promote community cohesion exceptionally well. Various community groups, including charitable organisations, are frequently welcomed into school. As the governing body strives to promote continuous improvement, the impact of the school’s work on the local and wider community is evaluated rigorously. The governing body also ensures that resources are used wisely, to the extent that the school provides outstanding value for money. The governing body works very effectively to ensure that everything possible is done to ensure that pupils are safe and secure. In this respect policies are

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very clear, detailed and understood by all staff. Regular updates and very high quality training also help to ensure that staff are up-to-date and vigilant at all times.

The school’s engagement with parents and carers is outstanding and it works very effectively to ensure that they are well informed about the day-to-day operation of the school, special events and about their children’s progress. Partnerships to support the learning and well-being of pupils are also outstanding. For example, the school provides highly-valued training events and outreach work to support staff in other schools in addressing special needs. The partnership with Barnardo’s, which supports the families of children with special needs, is also greatly appreciated by parents and carers.

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

Views of parents and carers

The questionnaires returned by parents and carers express very positive views of the school and all aspects of its work. Many parents and carers made additional comments commending the school for the progress their children are making and saying how much their children enjoy attending the school. For example, one parent said: ‘We are absolutely delighted with Thriftwood School. It is a warm, friendly and professional environment in which we have seen our son blossom. What a fantastic school Thriftwood is.’ The proportion of parents and carers who returned their questionnaire is similar to that found in most special schools but the level of favourable responses is high when compared with other special schools.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Thriftwood 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 40 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 131 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	33	83	7	18	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	83	6	15	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	70	11	28	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	60	16	40	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	25	64	14	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	26	65	12	30	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	28	70	11	28	0	0	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)	25	63	14	35	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	70	10	25	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	67	11	28	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	73	10	25	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	33	83	7	18	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	30	75	10	25	0	0	0	0

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



12 May 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Thriftwood School, Chelmsford CM2 8RW

I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave when we visited your classes and for the time you spent talking to us about Thriftwood during our recent inspection visit. Many of you mentioned that you think you attend an excellent school. Many of your parents and carers think so too and so do we.

We were most impressed by how hard you work and by the excellent progress you make. We soon became aware that the staff do all they can to make sure you have everything you need to learn successfully. They take exceptionally good care of you and always seem to find something at which you can achieve success. We particularly like the way in which your school's business and enterprise specialism is helping to prepare you for the world of work and for the next stages of your education. We were similarly impressed by your Forest Schools project, the outdoor learning opportunities and by the understanding that your school's Fairtrade status has brought.

Your headteacher and members of the governing body are always seeking ways of making Thriftwood an even better school. With this in mind we have asked them to explore ways of providing a dedicated room in which staff can promote your sensory development. This will save them all the hard work of having to set up every time they need to do sensory work with you.

I would like to close by wishing you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Godfrey Bancroft
Lead inspector

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