

Thriftwood School

Slades Lane, Galleywood, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 8RW

Inspection dates

12–13 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The two headteachers provide outstanding leadership. They have a dynamic vision and exceptionally high expectations. Pupils' well-being and achievement carefully underpin all decision-making.
- Trustees and governors have created a very warm and friendly school, where pupils thrive. There is strong capacity to sustain excellence and to continue to improve.
- Safeguarding is at the heart of the school. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for. Pupils say they feel safe and know how to stay safe.
- Staff actively promote pupils' welfare. They foster successful positive working relationships with parents and a wide range of agencies. Parents are unanimous in their praise for staff.
- Pupils receive outstanding personalised learning and support. This ensures that they make excellent progress towards their individual targets.
- The curriculum is creative and inspiring. Topics and enrichment activities stimulate curiosity and promote pupils' interest in learning.
- Leaders' excellent use of the pupil premium funding ensures that disadvantaged pupils make rapid progress.
- Pupils' attendance is well above average.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are outstanding. This is because of the highly interesting and motivating lessons, together with the exceptional support they receive from all adults.
- Staff are highly skilled at helping pupils to develop their communication and self-help skills, whatever their level of needs.
- Pupils' transitions into the school are managed very skilfully. This means that the vast majority of pupils joining the school settle in quickly.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and fully appreciate the excellent progress their children make.
- Post-16 students receive the same outstanding teaching and, as a result, continue to make substantial progress from their various starting points.
- All pupils gain suitable qualifications and move onto further education or employment.
- The recently revised procedures for assessment are not fully established.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders need to embed the school's newly established assessment procedures throughout the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The exceptional skills of the school headteacher and the college headteacher make a powerful combination. They are relentless in their ambition and drive for improvement. They share a vision and a passion for the difference they can make to pupils' lives. They are fully supported by the strongly motivated staff in the pursuit of excellence for pupils' achievement and personal development.
- Leaders have worked tirelessly to achieve a smooth transition between the school and college. Together, they have developed the environment, curriculum and approaches to learning that enable pupils to settle quickly and make outstanding gains in their learning and in their personal development. This ensures that no learning time is lost, and pupils make the transition without becoming worried.
- The school's self-evaluation rightly reflects a provision which is striving for excellence at every opportunity. They use the information gathered to inform meticulous school improvement planning. Leaders and governors have a realistic view of the strengths and weaknesses in the school.
- Leaders use monitoring information extremely well to devise insightful plans for improvement. Their accurate judgements mean that areas for development are identified in detail. Action is taken swiftly to provide highly relevant training and support for teachers to ensure continual improvement.
- The carefully thought-out curriculum is exceptionally well planned and specifically adapted to provide individual, personalised learning programmes. This includes personalised academic, social and physical targets for every pupil. Outstanding sensory programmes enable stimulus and access for all pupils. This results in very significant steps forward in their physical development. Classrooms are extremely well equipped with resources that provide pupils with an inspiring place to learn.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is very strong and permeates every aspect of the school. The school's dynamic Forest School programme utilises the woodland space for pupils to learn about the natural environment. This promotes self-awareness, problem-solving and cooperation with others. Pupils are given opportunities to participate in engaging and motivating activities that develop their confidence and self-esteem.
- Rigorous procedures are in place to monitor teachers' performance. Teachers are well aware of their accountability for pupils' performance.
- Leaders regularly visit lessons to check the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress. They also scrutinise teachers' plans and pupils' work. Any variability in teaching is fully addressed through regular training opportunities for all staff. This results in pupils making outstanding progress across the key stages.
- Leaders and governors ensure that pupil premium funding is spent wisely and is meticulously accounted for. Using their detailed knowledge of individual pupils, leaders have identified precisely the barriers to learning that disadvantaged pupils face. Pupils

of all abilities benefit from tailored teaching and support for their personal development.

- Leaders spend the additional Year 7 catch-up premium and the funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities effectively. Funding is used well to enhance pupils' development of literacy and numeracy. Good provision is also made for the development of pupils' social, emotional and mental health.
- The primary physical education and sport premium is used exceptionally well to extend pupils' fitness and skills. Pupils value the wide range of sports on offer and the opportunities to use the new equipment that has been purchased. These activities have supported team-building and developed pupils' confidence.
- Leaders have recently updated the school's system to monitor and assess pupils' progress. Leaders acknowledge that more time is needed for these procedures to become embedded before the use of assessment is fully effective.
- The local authority provides light-touch support for this outstanding school. The school is outward-looking and forward-thinking. It offers outreach support to leaders, teachers and support staff in mainstream schools, who work with pupils who have moderate learning difficulties with complex additional needs. The school develops the knowledge and understanding of staff, providing them with strategies to improve pupils' access to the curriculum, social and communication skills, learning and behaviour.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and college. They are extremely satisfied with its work. They value the very strong partnerships they have with school and college staff. They are confident their children are well taught and looked after. One parent said: 'The staff do an exceptional job in providing our children with the additional skills and strategies they will need to cope with life outside of their very safe school environment.' Another said, 'This is an amazing school full of heart and passion.'

Governance of the school

- The chief executive of the SEAX Academy Trust is determined and highly effective in fulfilling her role. Her actions have continuously supported the school and ensure that it is an exceptional place for learning. She conveys strongly her strategic vision, ambition and sense of moral purpose.
- The chair of governors makes an outstanding contribution to the school. She shares the headteachers' passion to do everything possible to meet the needs of the pupils.
- Members of the governing body have the necessary skills and expertise to hold leaders rigorously to account for pupils' progress and achievement. They provide exceptionally strong support and rigorous challenge. They make a significant contribution to the school's checks on how well it is doing and the improvement plans that are proposed by school leaders.
- Governors have suitable oversight of the school's expenditure. They make sure that teachers only receive pay enhancements for good performance. Governors have a good understanding of how the pupil premium money is spent. They have rightly challenged leaders on the impact it has had in the past on eligible pupils and can demonstrate the extremely positive outcomes it is now securing.

- Governors check the arrangements for safeguarding and work closely with leaders to keep pupils safe.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Rigorous checks regarding the suitability of staff and volunteers are made and the school maintains its single central record of these checks accurately.
- All policies and procedures are in place and reflect the latest national guidance. Staff are very well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Detailed risk assessments are regularly updated.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school and enjoy their lessons. They are taught how to keep themselves safe through a well-balanced curriculum which addresses aspects of personal safety. Their parents are in strong agreement that they are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teaching throughout the school and college promotes excellent learning for all pupils. Pupils are fully supported as soon as they join the school. Their individual needs are catered for precisely. The school prepares them well for the next stage of their education.
- Teachers are meticulous in their attention to detail when planning their lessons. They give careful thought to the type and location of activities, the resources, the preferred means of communication and the support each child will need to achieve their individual goals. Teaching staff then ensure that these plans are put into practice in the classroom effectively.
- Class teams, made up of a teacher and learning mentors, are extremely effective. They are fully aware of each pupil's needs and work together to achieve these.
- Classrooms are thoughtfully designed and stimulate the senses. Pupils understand the well-established classroom routines. Staff are highly skilled in encouraging pupils to manage their own behaviour, take increasing responsibility for their learning and become less reliant on adult direction.
- Communication strategies are used and reinforced consistently by all staff. This enables pupils to feel confident and self-assured. They make rapid progress in developing their independence skills. Pupils competently make choices and confidently express how they are feeling.
- Staff and learning mentors understand pupils' needs exceptionally well. Individual education plans are appropriate and reflect the school's holistic approach, identifying pupils' social development, personal care and educational development needs. Staff share information effectively and use their precise knowledge of each pupil to provide the right blend of challenge, encouragement and support.
- Literacy, numeracy and pupils' communication and language skills are taught very effectively. Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and thrive in this caring environment.

Additional activities, clubs and educational visits provide excellent opportunities to prepare each pupil for life in the community.

- Leaders and staff ensure that pupils have access to specialised furniture, equipment and learning resources that meet their specific needs. This enables them to access learning fully and make outstanding progress from their given starting points.
- The school provides a safe and stimulating environment which engages pupils in their learning. The school regards itself as an 'Outdoor School'. The extensive school grounds offer a wealth of opportunities for learning outside the classroom. Pupils develop self-esteem, self-confidence, resilience and risk-taking skills by experiencing the outside world beyond the classroom.
- Parents and carers are extremely pleased with the progress their children make in lessons, as are the pupils who spoke with the inspectors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils settle into school quickly because of the excellent quality of support and care they receive. They thrive on the encouragement they receive and display excellent attitudes to learning.
- Every pupil is known individually to staff. Staff provide pupils with high-quality care, support and advice to ensure that their personal development and welfare needs are met and that they achieve well.
- Pupils do not hesitate in approaching teachers if they have any worries. They know that teachers will provide the necessary support and action to resolve any concerns.
- Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe in a number of ways. For example, they are taught about e-safety, road safety and how to stay safe in the local community.
- Parents report that they are extremely happy with the school's care of their child. Parents overwhelmingly agreed that they would recommend the school to anyone.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to this school and thrive in its warm friendly atmosphere.
- Pupils greet visitors politely and are keen to promote their school and to talk about what they have learned in lessons. Excellent relationships are evident throughout the school.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and the site is exemplary. They are polite, cheerful, well mannered and highly respectful to other staff and pupils. The behaviour records show very few incidents of poor behaviour.
- The dining hall is a calm and cheerful place to be. Playtimes are fun. Pupils have an excellent range of resources that stimulate their imagination.

- Bullying in school is very rare. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. The use of derogatory language in school is non-existent.
- Pupils attend regularly and are punctual. As a result, pupils' attendance is well above average. Those pupils who attend less frequently have a medical reason for this. Persistent absence is very low.
- Pupils arrive at school each day with happy smiles and pleasant greetings for staff and other pupils.
- The school site is secure and supervised well. The school environment is free from litter and graffiti.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- The school is exceptionally successful in teaching pupils how to communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs in a positive way. This reduces their anxiety and enables them to focus much better in lessons. It also enables them to learn to manage their own behaviour and remain calm at other times of the day, such as lunchtimes. This is a significant achievement, and an important factor in why their progress in lessons is outstanding.
- Pupils in all key stages and in all groups make equally strong progress. Teachers adapt activities exceptionally well to take account of each pupil's learning needs. Pupils make significant gains in their self-confidence and self-esteem thanks to the carefully tailored programmes they are taught.
- The progress and achievement of pupils in receipt of the Year 7 catch-up funding and those entitled to pupil premium funding are similar to or better than those of others in the school. Each child, including the most able, receives an extremely high level of individual teaching and support which are carefully tailored to their needs. The well-judged use of funding in music therapy enhances communication, engagement and physical development. This encourages pupils to achieve their full potential.
- The outstanding use of communication techniques is a strength of the school. There are frequent opportunities to communicate using gestures, signs and symbols to drive progress at a rapid rate. Every pupil is able to express choice and respond to or ask questions.
- Inspectors observed pupils reading confidently in class with fluency and with good comprehension skills. Staff are effective in helping pupils to read or spell unfamiliar words.
- Pupils who have attention deficit hyperactive disorders and autistic spectrum disorders make outstanding progress in their sensory development. They are given clearly defined routines, allowing them to cooperate well and sustain concentration.
- The school's business and enterprise specialism has a prominent profile, providing an excellent means for pupils to apply their skills practically.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Leadership is outstanding. The headteacher's passion, commitment and determination

ensure that every student is given the best opportunity to succeed. She has created a culture of high expectations and continuous reflection and improvement. Leaders continuously drive improvement through their rigorous monitoring of the provision and outcomes. This ensures that the support for individual pupils' learning is the best it can be.

- The subjects and activities provided for students are highly appropriate and balance academic rigour with personal, social and emotional development extremely well. Each student has a personal learning pathway which is matched expertly to their specific needs and interests.
- Students' outcomes are outstanding because the quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers promote students' maturity by enabling them to do things for themselves and by using age-appropriate resources. This prepares students for life beyond Thriftwood and ensures that they are ready to participate in the work environment and live purposeful, independent lives.
- Students continue to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers provide motivating activities to capture the interest of the students and encourage them to develop their reading, writing, communication and mathematical skills. They make excellent progress by learning to apply these skills in work-related tasks, travelling independently and in the community.
- Behaviour is outstanding because teachers encourage students to regulate their own behaviour, which they do exceptionally well. This underpins the inspired behavioural code of conduct that encourages students to behave as adults.
- Students achieve extremely well in a wide range of external accreditations, such as vocational courses and GCSEs in English and mathematics. An array of other accredited courses are completed by students, according to their ability and interests.
- All students who left the school in July 2016 gained accreditation and secured a place in further education. They have the knowledge and skills to cope with the demands of the next stage of their education.
- Students receive high-quality, independent guidance and advice from a specialist careers adviser. Work experience, externally and within school, is an integral part of students' education. As a result, they develop essential skills to use in the community.
- Enterprise skills are developed through community and charity events. At all times, there is a continual drive to develop students' skills for learning, life and employability.

School details

Unique reference number	137554
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10036252

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

Type of school	All-through special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	217
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	57
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Anne-Marie Briggs
Headteachers	Mrs Georgina Pryke [School] Mrs Elizabeth Smart [College]
Telephone numbers	01245 266 880 [School] 01245 262 779 [College]
Website	www.thriftwoodschool.com
Email address	admin@thriftwoodschool.com
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Thriftwood School is part of the SEAX Trust. It is a multi-academy trust in Essex, established by the Special School Sector in April 2015. Its vision is to provide outstanding educational experiences for children and young people who have special educational needs. It also puts the well-being and achievement of pupils at the heart of all decision-making.
- The school caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties and additional complex needs. The Apex, a part of Thriftwood School, is a community centre providing support for children and families.

- Thriftwood College, which is part of Thriftwood School, provides education for students with moderate learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders, between the ages of 14 and 19.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is above average.
- Three times as many boys as girls currently attend the school.
- A small proportion of pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- The school does not currently use the services of any alternative providers.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors observed learning across nearly every year group and across a range of subjects. The vast majority of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors looked at the work in pupils' books. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their work.
- A wide range of documents and policies were looked at, including safeguarding documentation and records of attendance. Inspectors scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and development plans. They looked at policies, records of attendance and behaviour and the school's single central record of vetting checks.
- Meetings were held with the two headteachers and other leaders, groups of pupils, governors and the trust's chief executive officer. Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils throughout the two days. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority.
- Questionnaires submitted by 51 members of staff were scrutinised. Inspectors gathered the views of parents by speaking to some of them at the school gate, analysing the 42 responses to the Parent View questionnaire and considering the 43 text responses. Pupil questionnaire responses were viewed.

Inspection team

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gary Rawlings	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Cox	Ofsted Inspector

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